Heartland Genealogy Blog Posts Nov-Dec 2025

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ABC Biography: Leslie Mentzer

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
November 1, 2025
Mentzer
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/11/01/abc-biography-leslie-mentzer/

Biography of Leslie George Mentzer (1898–1988)

Early Life and Family

Leslie George Mentzer was born on **August 23, 1898**, in **Woodson County, Kansas**, the son of **Charles Oliver Mentzer** and **Nettie Adell Wells**.

He spent his early years in rural eastern Kansas. The 1900 U.S. Census lists him as a two-year-old living in **North Township, Woodson County**, with his parents. By 1910, the family had moved to **Liberty Township, Coffey County**, where Leslie attended the **Rose Mound School (District No. 9)** under teacher Robert Throckmorton in January 1915.

Education and Early Work

In the **1915 Kansas state census**, sixteen-year-old Leslie was living with his family in **Neosho Township, Coffey County**. Like many young men of his generation, he registered for the **World War I draft** on **September 12, 1918**, in Neosho Falls. The following year's census records show him still living with his parents and helping with the family farm in **Everett Township, Woodson County**.

Marriage and Family Life

On **April 16, 1924**, Leslie married **Vesta Marie Danielson** at the **Methodist parsonage in Neosho Falls**, with **Rev. Hall** officiating. A newspaper reported:

"Mr. Leslie Mentzer and Miss Vesta Danielson were united in marriage at the Methodist parsonage by Rev. Hall, Wednesday afternoon at 4:30 o'clock. The bride wore a lovely dress of gray georgette. They left immediately for Pittsburg, Kansas, on a short honeymoon. On their return they will be at their home west of town. Mr. and Mrs. Mentzer are well known in Neosho Falls and have a host of friends who join in wishing them a long journey together on life's pathway."

The couple settled near Neosho Falls and began raising their family.

Their children were:

1. **Lila Marie Mentzer**, born January 31, 1925, in Woodson County, who later married **Victor Bogacz** on August 13, 1945, in Sharon Springs, Kansas.
2. **Norman Eugene Mentzer**, born and died April 16, 1927, buried at **Cedarvale Cemetery** in Neosho Falls.
3. **William L. Mentzer**, who married **Marjorie Joan Hiser** on October 28, 1951, in Iola, Kansas.

Community and Farming Life

By 1930, the Mentzers were living in **Geneva Township, Allen County**, where Leslie worked as a farmer. The couple's home reflected the agricultural rhythm of Kansas life during the Great Depression.

In **1939**, Leslie purchased farmland in **Allen County**, described in the records as "the NW ¼ of Section 2, Township 24, Range 17." He continued to farm there through the 1940s and 1950s.

The **1940 census** lists Leslie, age 41, living in Allen County with Vesta, their daughter Lila, and son William. He again registered for the military draft during **World War II** on **February 16, 1942**, in Neosho Falls.

Family Gatherings and Social Life

Leslie and Vesta's 25th wedding anniversary was celebrated on **April 17, 1949**, with a large gathering of family and friends at their home in Iola:

"Sunday, April 17th Mr. and Mrs. Leslie Mentzer were very pleasantly surprised when 59 relatives and friends came in with well filled baskets to help celebrate their 25th wedding anniversary. Their daughter Mrs. Bogacz made the beautifully decorated four-tier wedding cake with the usual miniature bride and groom."

The newspaper listed dozens of relatives in attendance, including many Mentzer, Wells, and Green family members, reflecting their close community ties.

Leslie and Vesta were also mentioned in local papers for everyday milestones. In **1954**, they were described as *"the very proud owners of a T.V. set"*—a symbol of changing times in small-town Kansas.

Throughout their lives, the Mentzers remained active members of the **Neosho Falls United Methodist Church**.

Later Years

In later decades, Leslie and Vesta continued living in **Neosho Falls and Geneva Township**. Leslie occasionally bought and sold parcels of farmland with family members, including his daughter and son.

He lived a long and steady life rooted in the same Kansas countryside where he was born. On **April 19, 1988**, Leslie passed away at **Countryside Estates in Iola**, aged 89.

His obituary in *The Wichita Eagle* read:

"Leslie G. Mentzer, 89, retired farmer, died Tuesday, April 19, 1988. Survivors: wife, Vesta; son, Bill of Iola; daughter, Lila Bogacz of Blue Springs, Mo.; six grandchildren; 11 great-grandchildren. Memorial has been established with United Methodist Church."

Funeral services were held at the **Neosho Falls United Methodist Church**, officiated by **Rev. Gerald Pringle**, followed by burial in **Cedarvale Cemetery**.

Vesta Marie (Danielson) Mentzer (1900–1993)

Vesta was born **December 23, 1900**, in **Martland, Fillmore County, Nebraska**. She grew up in Kansas and lived most of her life alongside Leslie in Allen and Woodson Counties.

After Leslie's death, she continued to live in the area until her own passing on **February 16, 1993**, at the age of 92. She was laid to rest beside her husband at **Cedarvale Cemetery** in Neosho Falls.

Historical Context

Leslie George Mentzer's life spanned a transformative period in American history. Born at the end of the 19th century, he witnessed the rise of automobiles, airplanes, and radio; lived through both World Wars and the Great Depression; and adapted to technological changes such as the introduction of television in rural Kansas.

As a lifelong farmer, Leslie experienced firsthand the challenges of the Dust Bowl years and the gradual modernization of agriculture through mechanization and improved infrastructure. His strong ties to the Neosho Falls community and his Methodist faith anchored him in the social fabric of small-town Kansas life—a world shaped by cooperation, hard work, and family gatherings.

RootsMagic Narrative Report for Leslie Mentzer

Leslie George Mentzer was born on 23 Aug 1898 in Woodson County, Kansas. [1–4]

He was the child of Charles Oliver Mentzer and Nettie Adell Wells. [3]

George L Mentzer was listed in the household of Charles Mentzer as a 2 year old male born Aug 1898 in KS on the 1900 census living in North Township, Woodson, Kansas, United States. [5]

Lester Mentzer was listed as a 6 year old male who was born in Kansas in the household of C. O. Mentzer living in Neosho Falls, Woodson County, Kansas. [6]

Leslie G. Mentzer was listed in the household of Charles O. Mentzer as an 11 year old male who was born in Kansas on the 1910 census living in Liberty Township, Coffey, Kansas, United States. [7]

In Jan 1915, he was educated by Robt Throckmorton at Rose Mound School (District No. 9) in Coffey County, Kansas. [8–9]

Leslie Mentzer was listed in the household of C. O. Mentzer as a 16 year old male who was born in Kansas on the 1915 Kansas census living in Neosho Township, Coffey County, Kansas. [10]

Leslie registered for the military draft on 12 Sep 1918 in Neosho Falls, Woodson, Kansas, United States. [11]

Leslie Mentzer was listed in the household of Charles O. Mentzer as a 20 year old male who was born in Kansas on the 1920 census living in Everett Township, Woodson, Kansas, United States. [12]

L G Mentzer was listed as a 26 year old male farmer who was born in Kansas on the 1925 Kansas census living in Everett Township, Woodson County, Kansas. Also listed in the household was his wife, V. M. Mentzer. [13]

On on 10 Jul 1926, he attended the Wells family reunion in Neosho Falls, Woodson, Kansas, United States. [14]

Leslie G. Mentzer was listed as a 31 year old male farmer who was born in Kansas on the 1930 census living in Geneva Township, Allen County, Kansas. Also listed in the household was his wife, Vesta and his 5 year old daughter, Lila. [15]

He lived in Neosho Falls, Woodson County, Kansas in Feb 1939. [16]

Leslie purchased land being the NW 1/4 of Section 2 Township 24 of Range 17 to Arthur Van Loon, et. al. by trustee deed in May 1939 in Allen County, Kansas. [17–18] being the NW 1/4 S2T24R17 to Arthur Van Loon, et. al. by trustee deed

Leslie G. Mentzer was listed as a 41 year old male farmer who was born in Kansas living in Allen County, Kansas on the 1940 census. Also listed in the household is his wife, Vesta, a 15 year old daughter, Lila and a 9 year old son, William. [19]

He registered for the military draft on 16 Feb 1942 in Neosho Falls, Woodson County, Kansas. [20]

He celebrated his 25th wedding anniversary on 17 Apr 1949 in Iola, Allen County, Kansas. [21]

The Iola Register (Iola, Kansas) 26 Apr 1949, Tue
image 4
Sunday, April 17th Mr. and Mrs. Leslie Mentzer were very pleasantly surprised when 59 relatives and friends came in with well filled baskets to help celebrate their 25th wedding anniversary. Their daughter Mrs. Bogaez made the beautifully decorated four tier wedding cake with the usual miniature bride and groom. The following people were in attendance: Mr. and Mrs. E. E. Mentzer and Norryce, Mr. and Mrs. Emil Beine and Norman, Mr. and Mrs. Lauren Ryan. Mr. and Ms. Harley Mentzer and Ruthann, Ralph. Phillip Mentzer. Mr. and Mrs. M. B. Mentzer, Jerry Lee, Ed. Herald and Laura. Miss Alberta Cook all of Yates Center: Mr. and Mrs. Warren Snodgrass. Mrs. Victor Bogacz. Barbara Sisson from Kansas City; Juanita Mentzer and Margaret Hamilton from Wichita; Mrs. E. O. Briles and Roberta and Barbara of Emporia. Mr and Mrs. Roy Green, Louis, Kenneth from Burlington; Gerald Green from Topeka; Mr and Mrs Herbert Mentzer. Mr and Mrs. Edward Strawder from LeRoy; Mr and Mrs. Clint Wells of Gridley; Mrs A. M. Danickson, Arthur. Mr and Mrs Everett Dutton, Nelda Ann, Thayne. Mr. and Mrs. Eugene Leedy, Marylynn, Robert and Jay. Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Todd, Donald. Mr. and Mrs. Ray Todd. C. O. Mentzer. Billy Mentzer and the honored couple Mr. and Mrs. Leslie Mentzer, all from Neosho Falls.

Leslie lived in Geneva Township, Allen, Kansas, United States in 1950. [22]

In Feb 1952, he spent several days with his daughter who is seriously ill in Kansas City, Wyandotte, Kansas, United States. [23]

He attended the funeral of Philip Embry Mentzer on 19 Jul 1952 in Yates Center, Woodson, Kansas, United States. [24–25]

Leslie is a very proud owners of a T.V. set in 1954. [26]

Mr. and Mrs.Leslie Mentzer are the very proud owners of a T.V. set.

He lived in Neosho Falls, Woodson County, Kansas in Aug 1955. [27]

He attended the funeral of John Wesley Williams in 1957 in Yates Center, Woodson, Kansas, United States. [28]

Leslie lived in Geneva Township, Allen, Kansas, United States in 1959. [29]

He lived in Geneva, Allen, Kansas in 1960. [30]

He was active in the Neosho Falls Methodist Church. [3]

Leslie lived in Neosho Falls, Woodson County, Kansas in 1976. [31]

He lived in Neosho Falls, Woodson County, Kansas in Mar 1977. [32–33]

He sold land being an interest in the NW 1/4 Section 2 Township 24 of Range 17 to Lila and Victor Bogacz and Bill and Marjorie Mentzer on 21 Dec 1984 in Allen County, Kansas. [17,34] being the 1/2 interest in the NW 1/4 S2T24R17 to Lila and Victor Bogacz and Bill and Marjorie Mentzer

Leslie sold land being an interest in the NW 1/4 Secton 2 Township 24 of Range 17 to Lila and Victor Bogacz and Bill and Marjorie Mentzer on 2 Jan 1985 in Allen County, Kansas. [17,35] being the 1/2 interest in the NW 1/4 S2 T24 R17 to Lila and Victor Bogacz and Bill and Marjorie Mentzer

He died on 19 Apr 1988 at the age of 89 at Countryside Estates in Iola, Allen County, Kansas. [1,3,36–38]

The funeral of he was held at 1:30 p.m. at the Neosho Falls United Methodist Church and was officiated by Rev. Gerald Pringle on 21 Apr 1988 in Neosho Falls, Woodson County, Kansas. [3] at 1:30 p.m. at the Neosho Falls United Methodist Church and was officiated by Rev. Gerald Pringle

Leslie was buried on 21 Apr 1988 at Cedarvale Cemetery in Neosho Falls, Woodson County, Kansas. [1,3]

Leslie G Mentzer, 89
OBITUARY
Wichita Eagle, The (KS) — Wednesday, April 20, 1988 Leslie G. Mentzer, 89, retired farmer, died Tuesday, April 19, 1988. Service 1:30 p.m. Thursday, United Methodist Church.

Survivors: wife, Vesta; son, Bill of Iola; daughter, Lila Bogacz of Blue Springs, Mo.; six grandchildren; 11 great-grandchildren. Memorial has been established with United Methodist Church. Waugh-Yokum Funeral Home, Iola.

Death
Leslie G.Mentzer
Leslie G. Mentzer of Neosho Falls died Tuesday, April 19, at Countryside Estates. He was 89 years old.
Mentzer was born Aug. 23, 1898, in Yates Center and as a young boy moved with his parents, Charles and Nettie Wells Mentzer to a farm west of Neosho Falls. He farmed all of his life and was active inthe Neosho Falls United Methodist Church and the community.
On April16, 1924, he married Vesta M. Danielson. She survives as do a son, Bill of Iola; a daughter, lila Bogacz of Blue Sprinigs, mo.; six grandchildren; and 11 great grandchildren. He was preceded in death by an infant son, two brothers and two sisters.
Services will be 1:30 p.m. Thursday in the Neosho Falls United Methodist Church. the Rev. Gerald Pringle will officiate. Burial will be in the Cedarvale Cemetery in Neosho Falls.
Friends may call at the Waugh-Yokum and Friskel Chapel, 16 N. Buckeye, until the morning of the service.
The family suggests memorials to the Neosho Falls United Methodist Church.

Leslie George Mentzer and Vesta Marie Danielson [39] were married on 16 Apr 1924 in Neosho Falls, Woodson County, Kansas. [3,40–43]

Mentzer – Danielson
Mr. Leslie Mentzer and Miss Vesta Danielson were united in marriage at the Methodist parsonage by Rev. Hall, Wednesday afternoon at 4:30 o'clock.
The bride wore a lovely dress of gray georgette.
They left immediately for Pittsburg, Kansas on a short honeymoon. On their return they will be at their home west of town.
Mr. and Mrs. Mentzer are well known in Neosho Falls and have a host of friends who join in wishing them a long journey together on life's pathway. May many joys be theirs.

Vesta Marie Danielson was born on 23 Dec 1900 in Martland, Fillmore, Nebraska, United States. [42,44]

She lived in Everett Township, Woodson County, Kansas on 1 Jul 1925. [45] V. M. Mentzer was listed as a 24 year female born in Nebraska on the 1925 census.

She lived in Geneva Township, Allen, Kansas, United States on 8 Apr 1930. [46] Vesta Mentzer was listed as a 29 year old female born in Nebraska on the 1930 census.

Vesta lived in Allen County, Kansas in Apr 1940. [47] Vesta M. Mentzer was listed as a 39 year old female born in Nebraska on the 1940 census.

She celebrated her 25th wedding anniversary on 17 Apr 1949 in Neosho Falls, Woodson County, Kansas. [21]

She attended the funeral of Philip Embry Mentzer on 19 Jul 1952 in Yates Center, Woodson, Kansas, United States. [24–25]

Vesta lived in Geneva, Allen, Kansas in 1960. [48]

She died on 16 Feb 1993 at the age of 92 in Kansas. [42,44,49–50]

She was buried after 16 Feb 1993 at Cedarvale Cemetery in Neosho Falls, Woodson County, Kansas. [42,44]

Leslie George Mentzer and Vesta Marie Danielson had the following children:

+2 i **Lila Marie Mentzer**, born 31 Jan 1925, Woodson, Kansas, United States; married Victor Bogacz, 13 Aug 1945, Sharon Springs, Wallace, Kansas, United States; died 15 Mar 2006, Lake Tapawingo, Jackson, Missouri, United States.

3 ii **Norman Eugene Mentzer** was born on 16 Apr 1927. [51]

He died on 16 Apr 1927 at the age of 0. [51]

He was buried at Cedarvale Cemetery in Neosho Falls, Woodson County, Kansas. [51]

+4 iii **William L. Mentzer**, married Marjorie Joan Hiser, 28 Oct 1951, Iola, Allen, Kansas, United States.

ENDNOTES:

1. Find a Grave, database and images, Find a Grave (www.findagrave.com : viewed online April 2017), memorial for Leslie George Mentzer (1898-1988), Find a Grave Memorial no. #76727240, created by Rising Sun, citing Cedarvale Cemetery, Neosho Falls, Woodson County, Kansas; accompanying photograph by RusingSun, Leslie George Mentzer.

2. Woodson County (Kansas) Clerk. Woodson County Kansas Births and Deaths (Yates Center, Kansas:), transcription by Betty J. Wasmer, page 93 (Doc. #: Mentzer.KS.016)

3. "Death – Leslie G. Mentzer," The Iola Register (Iola, Kansas), 19 April 1988, page 6; digital image, Newspapers.com (www.newspapers.com : viewed online 28 July 2021).

4. Crawford Family Papers; privately held by Marcia Philbrick, Seneca, Kansas, 2016. Bible Charles O. Mentzer. passed down to Marcia Philbrick by Pauline Briles.

5. 1900 U.S. Census, North Township, Woodson County, Kansas, population schedule, North Township, Woodson County, Kansas, SD 4, ED 186, page 1A, Image 1 of 12, household 2, Mentzer Charles; digital image, Ancestry.com (www.ancestry.com : viewed online July 2016); FHL microfilm: 1240503

6. 1905 Kansas Census, Neosho Falls, Woodson County, state census, Neosho Falls, Woodson County, Kansas, page 12, Image 152 of 173, household 72, C. O. Mentzer; digital image, Ancestry.com (www.ancestry.com : viewed online November 2017); Kansas State Historical Society

7. 1910 U.S. Census, Liberty Township, Coffey County, Kansas, population schedule, Liberty Township, Coffey County, Kansas, ED 15, sheet 7B, Image 14 of 30, household 124, Charles O Mentzer; digital image, Ancestry.com (www.ancestry.com : viewed online November 2017)

8. "Every Child in School," The Daily Republican (Burlington, Kansas), 18 January 1915, image 6; digital image, Newspapers.com (www.newspapers.com : viewed online August 2018).

9. "Rosemund School," Coffey County Footprints (September 1986), page 87.

10. 1915 Kansas Census, Coffey County, State Census, Coffey County, Neosho Township, 11 (image 21 of 58), Image 21 of 58, dwelling 91, C. O. Mentzer; digital image, Ancestry.com (www.ancestry.com : viewed online March 2016)

11. "World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918," database, Ancestry (Ancestry.com : viewed online April 2017), Leslie George Mentzer.

12. 1920 U.S. Census, Woodson County, Kansas, population schedule, Everett Township, Woodson County, Kansas, ED 155, Sheet 6A, Image 11 of 14, household 116, Charles O Mentzer; digital image, Ancestry.com (www.ancestry.com : viewed online November 2017); NARA microfilm publication T625

13. 1925 Kansas census, Woodson County Kansas, State Census, Everett Township, Woodson County, Kansas, Page 10, Image 13 of 47, Mentzer C O; digital image, Ancestry.com (www.ancestry.com : viewed online November 2017)

14. Wells Family Reunion, Neosho Falls, Woodson County, Kansas, 1926, Crawford Family Papers, privately held by Marcia Philbrick, Seneca, KS 66538.

15. 1930 U.S. Census, Allen County, Kansas, population schedule, Geneva Township, Allen County, Kansas, ED 9, sheet 3B, Image 6 of 9, household 71, Mentzer Leslie G; digital image, Ancestry.com (www.ancestry.com : viewed online April 2017); NARA T626

16. Mrs. C. O. Mentzer Obituary, Yates Center Kansas, Crawford Family Papers,privately held by Marcia Philbrick, Seneca, KS 66538

17. Allen County, Kansas Deed Indexes. Book 105, page 141 (Doc. #: Mentzer.KS.026).

18. "Real Estate Transfers," The Iola Register (Iola, Kansas), 27 May 1939; digital image, Newspapers.com (www.newspapers.com : viewed online 31 July 2021).

19. 1940 U.S. Census, Allen County, Kansas, population scheudle, Geneva Township, Allen County, Kansas, ED 1-9, Sheet 3A, Image 6 of 11, household 65, Mentzer Leslie; digital image, Ancestry.com (www.ancestry.com : viewed online April 2017); NARA T627

20. "U.S. WWII Draft Cards Young Men, 1940-1947," database, Ancestry.com (www.ancestry.com : viewed online December 2018), Leslie George Mentzer.

21. "Neosho Falls News Item," The Iola Register (Iola, Kansas), 26 April 1949; digital image, Newspapers.com (www.newspapers.com : viewed online August 2018).

22. 1950 U.S. Census, Allen County, Kansas, population schedule, Geneva township, Allen County, Kansas, ED 1-11, Sheet 8 (page 9), Image 9 of 12, line 10, Leslie G Mentzer; digital images, National Archives (1950census.archives.gov : viewed online 2 pr 2022)

23. "Geneva," The Iola Register (Iola, Kansas), 19 February 1952, image 2; digital image, Newspapers.com (www.newspapers.com : viewed online August 2018).

24. Attend Mentzer Rites (newspaper clipping), Yates Center, Woodson County, Kansas, 1952, Crawford Family Papers,privately held by Marcia Philbrick, Seneca, KS 66538

25. , Obituary Clipping (N.p.: n.p., n.d.), “Philip Mentzer” Yates Center News (Yates Center, KS).

26. “Local News,” The Iola Register (Iola, Kansas), 15 April 1954, page 10; digital image, Newspapers.com (www.newspapers.com : viewed online 10 June 2021).

27. “C. O. Mentzer Dies in Emporia,” The Iola Register (Iola, Kansas), 16 August 1955, page 1; digital image, Newspapers.com (www.newspapers.com : viewed online 22 July 2021).

28. “Out of Town Relatives Here for Williams Rites”, Yates Center News, (Yates Center, Kansas), 1 August 1957, page 5 col. 3 Y37; Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, KS.

29. Kansas, City and County Census Records, 1919-1961, Leslie G Mentzer, 1959; database with images, Ancestry.com (www.ancestry.com : viewed online December 2018). Original Source: Kansas State Board of Agriculture.

30. Kansas, City and County Census Records, 1919-1961, Leslie G. Mentzer, 1960; database with images, Ancestry.com (www.ancestry.com).

31. “Delos Paul Mentzer,” obituary, The Iola Register (Iola, Kansas), 13 May 1976; Newspapers.com (http://www.newspapers.com : viewed online April 2018).

32. “Deaths – Herbert W. Mentzer,” The Iola Register (Iola, Kansas), 25 March 1977, page 2; digital image, Newspapers.com (www.newspapers.com : viewed online 31 July 2021).

33. “Death Notices – Herbert W. Mentzer,” undated clipping, March 1977, from Daily Republican; Crawford Family Papers newspaper clippings, saved by Pauline Briles and passed down to Marcia Philbrick; privately held 2021 by Marcia Philbrick.

34. “Real Estate Transfers,” The Iola Register (Iola, Kansas), 22 January 1985, page 5; digital image, Newspapers.com (www.newspapers.com : viewed online 31 July 2021).

35. “Real estate transfers,” The Iola Register (Iola, Kansas), 16 February 1985, page 3; digital image, Newspapers.com (www.newspapers.com : viewed online 31 July 2021).

36. Social Security Administration, “U.S. Social Security Death Index,” database, Ancestry, Ancestry.com (www.ancestry.com : viewed online April 2017), Leslie G. Mentzer, 509-18-3467, before 1951.

37. “Leslie G. Mentzer, 89,” trascription, Wichita Eagle (Wichita, Kansas), 20 April 1988, obituary; GenealogyBank (www.genealogybank.com : viewed online April 2017).

38. Social Security Administration, “Social Security Applications and Claims Index, 1936-2007,” database on-line, Ancestry, Ancestry.com (https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/60901/ : viewed online May 2017), Leslite G. Mentzer.

39. Social Security Administration, “Social Security Applications and Claims Index, 1936-2007,” database on-line Lila Marie Mentzer [Lila Marie Bogacz].

40. Marriage License Record, Woodson County, Kansas, P. J. No. 568 Leslie George Mentzer and Vesta Marie Danielson, Woodson County Courthouse, Yates Center, Woodson County, Kansas.

41. Duncan, L. Wallace and Chas F. Scott, History of Allen and Woodson Counties, Kansas. (Iola, Kansas: Iola Register, 1901) pp. 831-832 (Doc. #: Mentzer.KS.025).

42. “Deaths – Vesa M Mentzer”, Iola Register, (Iola, Kansas), 17 February 1993, page 7; Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, KS.

43. “Menzter – Danielson,” The Neosho Falls Post (Neosho Falls, Kansas), 17 April 1924; digital image, Newspapers.com (www.newspapers.com : viewed online 30 July 2021).

44. Find a Grave, database and images, Find a Grave (www.findagrave.com : viewed online April 2017), memorial for Vesta Marie Danielson Mentzer (1900-1993, Find a Grave Memorial no. #76727210,

45. 1925 Kansas census, Woodson County Kansas, State Census, Everett Township, Woodson County, Kansas, Page 10, , Mentzer C O.

46. 1930 U.S. Census, Allen County, Kansas, population schedule, Geneva, Allen County, Kansas, ED 1-9, Sheet 3B, household 71, Leslie G. Mentzer.

47. 1940 U.S. Census, Allen County, Kansas, population scheudle, Geneva, Allen County, Kanas, ED 1-9, sheet 3A, household 65, Leslie G Mentzer; digital image, Ancestry.com (www.ancestry.com : viewed online January 2018); NARA T627

48. Kansas, City and County Census Records, 1919-1961, Leslie G. Mentzer, 1960; database with images, Ancestry.com (www.ancestry.com).

49. Social Security Administration, “U.S. Social Security Death Index”, database, Ancestry.com, Vesta M. Mentzer, 511-68-2214, 1973.

50. Social Security Administration, “Social Security Applications and Claims Index, 1936-2007,” database on-line Vesta Marie Mentzer.

51. Find a Grave, database and images, Find a Grave (www.findagrave.com : viewed online April 2017), memorial for Norman Eugene Mentzer (1927-?), Find a Grave Memorial no. #76727170,

Saturday Night Genealogy Fun

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
November 2, 2025
SaturdayNightGenealogyFun
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/11/02/saturday-night-genealogy-fun-175/

Calling All Genea-Musings Fans!

It's **Saturday Night** again — time for some **Genealogy Fun!**

Hey boys and girls, it's the day after Halloween, and that means it's time for another round of *Saturday Night Genealogy Fun!*

Here's your assignment, should you choose to accept it (and since you're reading this, I'm guessing you do — cue the *Mission Impossible* music!):

1) Think about your most memorable Halloween. Was it from your childhood (candy, games, and school carnivals)? Your teenage years (tricks, pranks, or parties)? Or adulthood (perhaps chaperoning little goblins or attending a costume bash)?

While most people remember carving pumpkins or decorating porches, one of my strongest Halloween memories is of *not* having a pumpkin at all! For several years, the local high school students held a contest to see who could collect the most pumpkins—meaning porch pumpkins were likely to disappear if left unattended. When I did have one, I brought it inside every night to keep it safe.

Because Halloween coincided with the end of the fall sports season, it often found me at high school events. I can still remember sitting at football games, silently hoping our car wouldn't get soaped while sitting in the parking lot.

But perhaps my most vivid Halloween memory is the year of the ice storm — watching our newly planted trees bend and break under the weight of a glistening layer of ice.

My memories may not center on costumes or trick-or-treating, but I do have a treasured photo of my brothers and me, dressed up for Halloween long ago.

Monday Diggings

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
November 3, 2025
Briles
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/11/03/monday-diggings-3/

Today's record from my **Briles** folder is an **1846 deed** from Randolph County, North Carolina, in which **John Briles and his wife, Priscilla, sold a tract of land.** John was the great-grandson of my ancestor, **Conrad Briles**, making him my **third great-granduncle.** This document offers another glimpse into the Briles family's presence and property transactions in mid-19th-century Randolph County.

The details of the transaction are recorded as follows:

> "Randolph, North Carolina, United States records," images, FamilySearch (https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3QS7-996W-K8XT?view=explore : Oct 22, 2025), image 683 of 955; . Image Group Number: 007560691
>
> page 37
>
> This Indenture made this second day of January in the year of our Lord One
> thousand Eight hundred and forty six Between John Briles and his wife
> Priscilla Briles his wife of the County of Randolph and State of North Carolina
> of the one part ; and Nathan Newby of said County & State , of the other part
> Witnesseth that for and in consideration of the sum of two hundred dollars
> to them in hand paid by the aforesaid Nathan Hawley at or before the
> delivery of these presents and sealing of the same the receipt whereof John Briles
> and his wife Priscilla Briles doth hereby acknowledge that they hath
> given granted bargained and sold , and by these presents doth grant bar
> gain and sell unto the said Nathan New by his heirs and assigns for
> ever a certain tract or parcel of land which fell to the aforesaid Priscilla
> and John Briles and which was laid off to them by the Commissioners
> in the Division of the real Estate of Samuel Hale Decd the said Land
> was her Distributive share , lying and being in the County & State a
> foresaid on Cable Creek ; Beginning at a Spanish oak original corner
> running thence west 47 chains to a post oak and black oak thence
> South Crossing Creek thirty one and a half chains to white Oak Corner
> of No . 9 . thence East forty seven chains to a post oak , in the original
> Line thence north on said line thirty one and a half Chains to the begining
> Containing one hundred forty Eight acres more or less – To have and
> to hold the right and title Together with all mines and minerals
> woods ways and waters advantages & appurtenances whatsoever

thereunto belonging to the said land or in and anywise appurtaining
to the said premises and every part ; thereof , to the said Nathan Newley
his heirs and assigns forever all the Estate interest of in or to the afore
said lands and premises hereby granted and sold unto the aforesaid
Nathan Newby and the aforesaid John Briles and his wife Priscilla
Briles for themselves their heirs and assigns will warrant and defend the
aforesaid premises and every part , thereof against any claim or claims
person or persons whatever by these presents unto the said Nathan Newby
his heirs and assigns for ever , In witness whereof the said John Briles
and his wife Priscilla Brils , hath hereunto set their hand and
affixed their Seals the day and year first above written in the
presence of us Signed Sealed & delivered in the presence of

John Briles Ⓟ
Priscilla Briles Ⓟ
State of North Carolina
Court of Please and quarter Sessions February Term
1846 Be it remembered that at a Court of pleas and quarter
Sessions began and held for the County of Randolph at the
Court house in Asheboro on the first Monday in February AD 1846

page 38
present on the bench H. B. Elliott Thomas Rice and Each Burns Justices
personally appeared in open Court John Briles and Priscilla Briles his wife and in
the presence of Each other acknowledged the signing sealing and delivery of the foregoing
deed whereupon the Court appointed H. B. Elliott Esqr one of their body to take
the present Exammination of the said Priscilla who retired with Priscille to the very of
the Court privily and apart from her said husband when & where she acknowledge
that she did Executed said deed freely and Volentarily , and without any fear
from compulsion or Constraint of her said husband and that she doth now do
freely & voluntarily assent thereto for the purposes therein mentioned ordered that the
deed with this Certificate be registered
H B Elliott JP
E Byrns JP
Thos Rice JP

Witness BF Hoover Clerk of said Ourt
BF Hoover CCC

By updating the sources in RootsMagic and attaching this deed to John Briles on FamilySearch, I've added another documented link in the Briles family story. Each land transaction like this one not only helps confirm family connections but also paints a clearer picture of how the Briles descendants of Conrad Briles lived and prospered in Randolph County. Every deed deepens the roots of our family history and preserves it for future researchers.

Untangling a Civil War Pension File with ChatGPT: Lessons from the Hutchinson Case

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
November 4, 2025
Hutchinson
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/11/04/albert-hutchinson-pension-file/

Have you ever worked with a military pension file?

When I first requested the Civil War military and pension records for my 2nd great-grandfather, I received only partial files. Recently, thanks to a generous researcher, I obtained a complete copy of **Albert Hutchinson's** full pension file.

At first glance, I considered it a **jumbled mess**—documents out of order, affidavits contradicting earlier ones, and handwriting that ranged from elegant to almost illegible. To make sense of it all, I turned to **ChatGPT** for help transcribing and analyzing the material.

📝 Working with ChatGPT: The Transcription Challenge

I've used ChatGPT for many genealogical tasks before—summarizing deeds, writing blog posts, even generating exhibit text for the historical society—but this transcription project was different.

The first attempts were frustrating. The AI began making **assumptions** based on modern phrasing instead of simply reading what was on the page. While some would call that "hallucinating," I realized it was trying to *interpret* rather than *transcribe*.

To overcome that, I adjusted my approach:

- Used the prompt **"transcribe letter by letter"**
- Reminded ChatGPT it was working with **historical handwriting and 19th-century phrasing**
- Pointed out obvious errors and asked it to **re-attempt specific sections**

Even with occasional corrections (and a few stubborn medical terms I had to transcribe myself), ChatGPT still completed the work **far faster than I could have by hand**.

📄 Turning Transcriptions into Research Data

Once the entire file was transcribed, I saved it as a PDF and asked ChatGPT to **analyze the document and create a timeline** of events. The AI extracted the essential details, producing a surprisingly coherent summary of a very tangled case file.

🪖 Military Service and Pension

- **Sept 1, 1862** – Enlisted as Private, Company D, 1st Iowa Cavalry
- **Feb 15, 1866** – Honorably discharged at Austin, Texas
- **Aug 16, 1890** – Filed for invalid pension (rheumatism, eye disease, piles, kidney trouble)
- **Dec 2, 1891** – Pension approved for $12 per month
- **May 31, 1897** – Pension Office marked him “deceased”

💍 Marriages

- **First marriage** (date unknown): Julia Hutchinson, deceased by **Jan 4, 1892**
- **Aug 8, 1893** – Married **Eliza Van Valkenburgh** in St. Joseph, Missouri
- **July 22, 1896** – Albert died in Wathena, Kansas
- **Nov 14, 1898** – Eliza remarried **Samuel King**
- Later married **Mr. Phay**, appearing in later records as *Eliza Phay*

🥓 Death and Burial

- **July 22, 1896** – Albert Hutchinson died in Wathena, Doniphan County, Kansas
  - Verified by undertaker **Peter Miller**, who sold the coffin that day
  - Witnesses: **George Hockaday** and **Peter Van Valkenburgh**

👶 Children

- **Guy Thomas Hutchinson** – Born Feb 29, 1876 (identified in 1941 Social Security correspondence)
- **William, Howard E., Winnie M., Eleanora M.** – Children from first marriage (Julia)
- **Elmer E. Hutchinson** – Born July 22, 1895 to Albert and Eliza; minor at his father’s death

---

📄 Pension and Guardianship Proceedings

- **Apr 25, 1911** – Eliza Phay (formerly Hutchinson) filed for a minor’s pension for son Elmer
- **May–Oct 1911** – Series of affidavits filed by **Peter Miller, Henry Harding, George Hockaday, Ella Van Valkenburgh**, and others
- **Nov 1, 1911** – **James A. Gibson** appointed guardian for Elmer E. Hutchinson
- **Jan 24, 1912** – Attorney **James K. Polk** urged the Pension Bureau to act
- **Feb–Apr 1912** – Additional affidavits filed; case marked **“Abandoned”** after lack of documentation

---

👵 Later Correspondence

- **1926** – Eliza (widow) requested a new pension; denied due to remarriage
- **1941** – Missouri Social Security Commission requested birth verification for **Guy Thomas Hutchinson**; Veterans Administration confirmed no birth record on file

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🕰️ Chronological Table

(Condensed for clarity — original created by ChatGPT)

Date	Event	People Involved	Location	Notes
Sept 1, 1862	Enlisted, Co. D, 1st Iowa Cav.	Albert Hutchinson	Iowa	Civil War service begins
Feb 15, 1866	Discharged	Albert Hutchinson	Austin, TX	End of service
Jan 4, 1892	Death of Julia Hutchinson	Julia Hutchinson	—	Witness: Peter Miller
Aug 8, 1893	Marriage to Eliza Van Valkenburgh	Albert & Eliza	St. Joseph, MO	Justice H. W. Burke
July 22, 1896	Death of Albert	Albert Hutchinson	Wathena, KS	Verified by Peter Miller
Apr 13, 1911	Minor's pension filed	Eliza Phay	St. Joseph, MO	For son Elmer
Nov 1, 1911	Guardian appointed	James A. Gibson	Buchanan Co., MO	For Elmer
1926	Widow's pension request	Eliza Hutchinson	St. Joseph, MO	Denied (remarriage)
1941	SSA birth inquiry	Guy Thomas Hutchinson	St. Joseph, MO	No record found

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👨‍👩‍👧‍👦 Albert's Children by Marriage

Marriage 1 – Julia Hutchinson
William, Howard E., Winnie M., Eleanora M., and Guy Thomas
(Listed in 1941 correspondence; children born before 1880)

Marriage 2 – Eliza Van Valkenburgh
Elmer E. Hutchinson (b. July 22, 1895)
(Referenced in 1911–1912 pension and guardianship affidavits)

💬 Reflection

Working through this file reminded me that **AI is a tool, not a substitute for judgment.**
ChatGPT excelled at organizing and structuring the data—but it occasionally "over-interpreted" old handwriting. Once I trained it to read **letter by letter** and reminded it of the historical context, it became a powerful transcription partner.

Even with its quirks, the process was faster, more organized, and far easier to analyze than working solely by hand. For a 19th-century file spanning nearly eighty years—from **Albert's 1862 enlistment** to **1941 government correspondence**—that's quite an achievement.

✍️ Closing Thought

This experience showed me how combining **genealogical skill** with **AI precision** can bring even the messiest pension files to life.
What began as a "jumbled mess" is now a fully transcribed, indexed, and analyzed story of one man's service, his family, and the paper trail they left behind.

Pension File Overview: Albert Hutchinson and Honore Eliza Van Valkenberg

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
November 5, 2025
Hutchinson
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/11/05/pension-file-overview-albert-hutchinson-and-honore-eliza-van-valkenberg/

When researching a family's story, pension files often provide a unique glimpse into their struggles, relationships, and resilience. The pension file for **Albert Hutchinson**, a Civil War veteran, is no exception. Using a full transcription of Albert's file, along with a narrative report about his second wife, **Honore Eliza Van Valkenberg**, I prompted **Google Notebook LM** to create an audio overview of their intertwined stories.

That audio has now been transformed into a short **video**, available on YouTube, offering a narrated summary of the key moments revealed in the documents.

About the Project

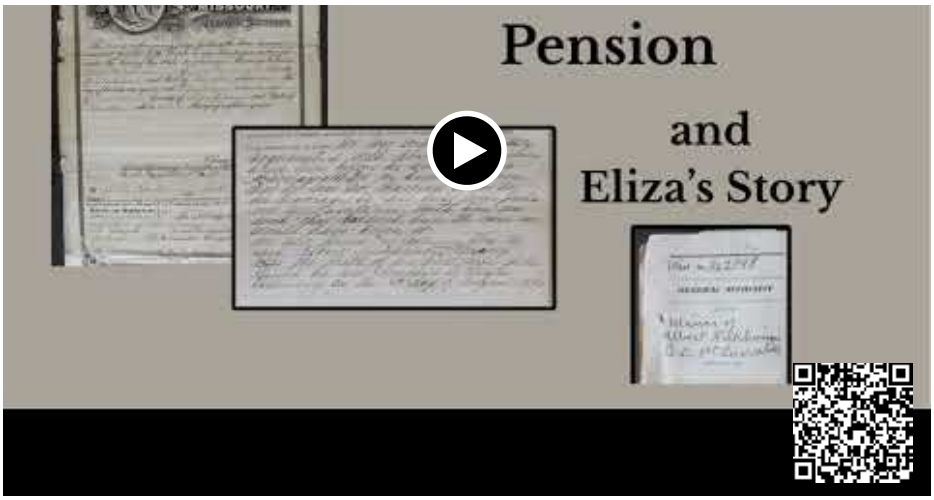
Albert Hutchinson's pension file is rich with details about his military service, post-war life, and the claims filed after his death. What makes this file especially compelling is the appearance of several of Honore Eliza's later husbands — each adding a new layer to her complex life story. Together, their records illustrate the human side of military pensions: love, loss, and the need for security in uncertain times.

By combining transcriptions from historical records with Notebook LM's AI-generated audio summary, this project showcases how modern tools can help bring historical documents to life. The video serves as both a storytelling experiment and an educational resource for those curious about how artificial intelligence can enhance genealogical research.

Watch the Video

You can watch the **"Pension File Overview – Albert Hutchinson and Honore Eliza Van Valkenberg"** video below:

https://youtube.com/watch?v=TkFOkResiPo



Why This Matters

Pension files are often overlooked treasures for family historians. They contain affidavits, witness statements, marriage information, and sometimes even glimpses of family conflict. Turning these transcriptions into narrative audio and visual content not only preserves the data but makes it accessible to a wider audience — including those who might prefer listening to history rather than reading it.

As technology continues to evolve, tools like Notebook LM give genealogists new ways to **interpret, share, and experience** family stories. This project is one small step toward blending traditional research with digital storytelling.

Closing Thoughts

Exploring Albert and Honore Eliza's intertwined lives through their pension and narrative records has deepened my appreciation for the resilience of 19th-century families. I hope this video inspires others to look beyond names and dates — to hear the voices that echo through the records we preserve.

From Immigrant to Officer: The Cei Family's Legacy of Military Service

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
November 6, 2025
Crawford
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/11/06/from-immigrant-to-officer-the-cei-familys-legacy-of-military-service/

Lt. Col. (Ret.) Peter Gervac Cei (1909–1981)

Early Life and Education

Peter Gervac Cei was born on **June 19, 1909**, in Germany to Italian parentsNarrative Report for Lt. Col.
He immigrated to the United States as a young man and pursued higher education at the **School of Mines and Metallurgy in Lexington, Missouri**, graduating in **May 1934** with a degree in mine engineering. While there, he served as a **cadet lieutenant** in the **Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC)**.

Becoming an American Citizen

Peter applied for U.S. citizenship and was naturalized on **June 18, 1935**, in **Council Bluffs, Iowa**. When he took his oath before Judge Charles A. Dewey, he renounced allegiance to both **Germany and Italy**, having been born in Germany to Italian parents. His case was highlighted in local newspapers for the unusual "double oath" he took to become a U.S. citizen.

Military Service

Shortly after becoming a citizen, Peter began his military career. In **1935**, he served in the military reserves in Council Bluffs, Iowa, and by **October 1939** was a **First Lieutenant** with the reserves in Fort Smith, Arkansas.
When the United States entered World War II, Peter was already on active duty. He was promoted to **Captain** in the Engineer Corps in **November 1942** and continued advanced training at **Fort Belvoir, Virginia**, the following year.
During the war, Peter served in Europe as an engineer officer and was **wounded in action in 1945**. He later achieved the rank of **Lieutenant Colonel**, a title he would carry throughout life. After the war, he was discharged on **June 30, 1947**.

Later Life and Career

Peter's military service continued to shape his life. Census and city directory records place him in **Arkansas** during the 1940s and 1950s, where he worked as a government supervisor and lived in both **Little Rock** and **DeKalb Township, Grant County**. By **1969**, he and his wife had retired to **Clearwater, Florida**.

Marriage and Family

Peter married **Dorothy Alice Lighter**, the daughter of **Alvin Hamilton Lighter** and **Lida A. Crawford**. Dorothy was born on **August 27, 1906**, in Kansas. She grew up in **Dodge City** and later attended school in **Rolla, Missouri**, where she appeared in the University of Missouri yearbooks of the late 1920s.
The couple's only known child, **Peter Gervas Cei Jr.**, was born on **June 30, 1935**, in **Glenwood, Mills County, Iowa**.

Dorothy supported her husband's military career, moving frequently between posts. In later years, she became active in civic groups such as the **Tropic Hills Garden Club** in Clearwater. She passed away on **July 10, 1975**, in **Plant City, Florida**, at the age of 68. Both Peter and Dorothy are buried at **Arlington National Cemetery**.

Passing

Lt. Col. Peter Cei died on **July 11, 1981**, in **Leavenworth, Kansas**, at the age of 72. His long and loyal service to both his adopted country and his family remains a lasting legacy.

Col. Peter Gervas Cei Jr. (1935–2025)

Early Life and Education

Peter Gervas Cei Jr. was born on **June 30, 1935**, in **Glenwood, Iowa**, shortly before his father's naturalization as a U.S. citizen. He spent his early childhood in Arkansas, as shown in census records from **1940 and 1950**, which list him living with his parents in **Pulaski** and later **Grant County**.

He attended the **University of Arkansas**, graduating in **1956** with a **Bachelor's degree in Business Administration**. During college, he participated in **ROTC**, preparing for a future military career, much like his father before him.

Military Career

Upon graduation, Peter was **commissioned as a Second Lieutenant** in the **Armored Force of the U.S. Army**. His service took him around the world, including **two tours in Vietnam**, where he earned **two Bronze Stars with an Oak Leaf Cluster** for bravery and leadership.
By the 1970s, he had risen to the rank of **Lieutenant Colonel** and participated in large-scale **military simulations** at **Fort Leavenworth** in 1978. After more than two decades of service, he **retired in February 1980**.

Marriage and Family

On **December 13, 1956**, Peter married **Cecil Christine Hargis** at **Fort Knox, Kentucky**. Christine was born **November 11, 1936**, in **Edgecombe, North Carolina**, the daughter of **Samuel C. and Christine Hargis** of Radcliff, Kentucky. Newspaper announcements described their **engagement** and **wedding** at the Fort Knox Post Chapel.

The couple had at least one son, **Peter Michael Cei**, born **November 26, 1957**, in **DeRidder, Louisiana**. He passed away in **April 2005**.

After Christine's passing on **September 5, 2019**, Peter remarried **Irene Hustead**, who survives him.

Later Years and Death

Following his military retirement, Peter and his family lived in **Kansas**, including **Bonner Springs** and later **Raymore, Missouri**, where he died on **September 26, 2025**, at age 90.
His obituary highlighted his dedication to both country and family—a reflection of the values shared by both father and son.

Legacy

The Cei family story spans two generations of military service, beginning with an immigrant who took a double oath to become an American and continuing through a son who served with distinction in Vietnam. From the battlefields of Europe to the training grounds of Fort Knox and the University of Arkansas campus, their lives intertwined personal commitment, patriotic duty, and the enduring bond of family.

Friday Find

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
November 7, 2025
Wells
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/11/07/friday-find-99/

Today's find comes from a photocopy of page one of the *Homer Index* (Homer, Michigan). The 2 March 1933 issue included the obituary of William O. Wells, a respected longtime resident and Civil War veteran whose life and service were well remembered in the community.

WILLIAM O. WELLS
FORMER HOMER BUSINESS MAN DIES IN MILWAUKEE

The death of William O. Wells, aged 88 years and a much beloved man in Homer, died at the home of his daughter, Mrs. Lena Wait, in Milwaukee, Friday, February 24th. Mr. Wells has lived with his daughter for the past eight years.

His three surviving children are Mrs. Lena Wait of Milwaukee, Mrs. Florence Baker of Marshall, and Preston Wells of Battle Creek.

Mr. Wells who was one of Homer's three remaining Civil War Veterans and for the past forty-three years has attended Memorial Day programs in Homer.

We can best give a brief sketch of the life of Mr. Wells from the book "Homer and Its Pioneers" which book was edited by the late William A. Lane and published in 1888.

Following is the history of the deceased.

William O. Wells, Past Commander of Gregg Post, was born in Clarendon, this county, February 4, 1846, being a son of William W. and Martha B. Wells. He removed with his father's family to this village in 1862 and in August of the same year enlisted in Company A, 25th Michigan Infantry and served in the U.S. army for three years. July 3, 1866, he married Ellen O. Andrus, of Clarendon, and has since been a resident of this place. He has frequently been called upon to fill official positions of trust, being an ex-village trustee, ex-township treasurer, ex-deputy sheriff of this county and in the latter capacity he was one of the best deputies Calhoun county has ever had. For a time he was in the mercantile business here and later dealt in insurance and real estate. Now and for a year or more past he has been a traveling salesman for the Pitts Agricultural Works of Buffalo, New York. He has three children: Lena D., Preston L., and Florence.

A Masonic funeral for Mr. Wells was held from the Westbrook Chapel Monday at 11 o'clock a.m. with burial in Fairview Cemetery.

WILLIAM O. WELLS
FORMER HOMER BUSINESS
MAN DIES IN MILWAUKEE

Without this photocopy shared by a generous Michigan researcher, I might never have located William O. Wells' obituary. This find is a perfect reminder that local research—and the collaboration of others who preserve hometown records—remains vital for uncovering the small but meaningful details that bring our ancestors' stories to life.

ABC Biography Herbert Wells Mentzer

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
November 8, 2025
Mentzer
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/11/08/abc-biography-herbert-wells-mentzer/

Herbert Wells Mentzer (1900–1977)

Early Life and Family

Herbert Wells Mentzer was born on **July 20, 1900**, on a farm northwest of Yates Center in **Woodson County, Kansas**. He was the son of **Charles O. Mentzer** and **Minnie Wells Mentzer**, and one of several children raised in a family that valued hard work and education.

By 1905, the family was living in **Neosho Falls, Kansas**, where four-year-old Herbert appeared in the Kansas State Census. The 1910 census found the Mentzers farming in **Liberty Township, Coffey County**, and by 1915 Herbert was enrolled in **Rosemund School**

District No. 9, a small rural school typical of early 20th-century Kansas. He later attended **Neosho Falls High School**, where he completed his education before entering the workforce.

Early Adulthood and World War I Era

Like most young men of his generation, Herbert registered for the military draft on **September 12, 1918**, in Woodson County during the final months of World War I. Although there is no record that he served in the war, his draft registration reflects the national mobilization of young men his age at the time.

In 1920, nineteen-year-old Herbert was still living with his parents in **Everett Township, Woodson County**, helping with farm work. During these years, he likely gained the mechanical skills that would later serve him well in railroad work.

Marriage and Family Life

Herbert married **Ruth Shirley Kitterman** on **September 17, 1928**, in **Oklahoma City, Oklahoma**. Ruth, a native of Coffey County, Kansas, was born on **February 6, 1906**, and had attended **Kansas State Teachers College in Emporia** before teaching in local schools.

The young couple began their married life in Oklahoma City, where Herbert worked as a **locomotive fireman** and engaged in **real estate**. Their first child, **Janice Joy**, was born on **June 11, 1929**, followed by a son, **Billie R. Mentzer**, around 1932.

Joy

The 1930 census shows the family comfortably settled in Oklahoma City. Newspaper accounts from the period describe Herbert as a hardworking man involved in community life and devoted to his growing family.

Railroad Career and Moves

By the mid-1930s, Herbert was working as a **fireman and later an engineer for the Santa Fe Railroad**, one of the largest and most influential rail lines in the American Midwest. In 1934, the family relocated to a **farm near Talala in Rogers County, Oklahoma**, where a local newspaper noted that Herbert “wanted to keep up with the news in northern Rogers and Nowata counties.”

The Mentzers remained in Oklahoma for several years before moving to **Shawnee, Pottawatomie County**, where Herbert continued his railroad career. The 1940 census lists him as a locomotive fireman with Ruth managing the household and caring for their children, Joy and Billie.

Tragedy struck the family when their young son **Billie** died around 1940, at only eight years of age. The loss profoundly affected Herbert and Ruth, who leaned on their faith and family for strength.

Return to Kansas and Later Years

During the 1940s, Herbert and Ruth returned to **Coffey County, Kansas**, settling on a **farm east of LeRoy**. He registered for the World War II draft in 1942, as required for men his age. Herbert became active in community life, joining the **Tuscan Lodge No. 82** of the **Masons** in Neosho Falls and later the **LeRoy United Methodist Church**.

In later years, Herbert transitioned from farming to a second career as a **real estate broker**, continuing to work well into the 1970s. Friends and family remembered him as industrious and fair-minded—a man who valued both his work and his community connections.

Herbert and Ruth

He frequently attended family gatherings and funerals, reflecting the close-knit nature of the Mentzer and Wells families. His name appeared often in local newspapers of Yates Center, LeRoy, and Iola, noting his visits, business dealings, and community involvement.

Death and Legacy

Herbert passed away on **March 25, 1977**, at the **Allen County Hospital in Iola, Kansas**, at the age of 76. His obituary described him as a **retired farmer and real estate salesman**, a **member of the Tuscan Lodge**, and a **faithful member of the LeRoy United Methodist Church**.

Survivors included his wife, **Ruth**, their daughter **Janice Joy (Mrs. Edward Strawder)** of LeRoy, a brother **Leslie Mentzer** of Neosho Falls, and sisters **Pauline Briles** of Emporia and **Gladys Green** of Newton, along with five grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. He was laid to rest in the **LeRoy Cemetery**, Coffey County, Kansas.

Ruth survived him by only a few months, passing away on **August 1, 1977**, at Sterling Heights Manor in Iola. She, too, was buried at LeRoy Cemetery beside Herbert and their son Billie.

Historical Context

Herbert's life spanned a transformative period in American history. Born at the dawn of the 20th century, he grew up during a time when Kansas and Oklahoma were defined by rural life, steam locomotives, and the steady march of modernization. His career with the **Santa Fe Railroad** connected him to a vital industry that powered American growth, linking small-town Kansas to the wider world.

He weathered the Great Depression, World War II, and the postwar boom, adapting from farming to business and embodying the resilience typical of Midwestern families of his generation. His membership in local civic and fraternal organizations—particularly the **Masons** and the **Methodist Church**—reflected his deep roots in community and faith.

Today, Herbert Wells Mentzer is remembered not just as a farmer and railroader but as part of a family whose history mirrors the broader story of rural Kansas life through much of the 20th century.

Saturday Night Genealogy Fun – What's in a Name

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
November 9, 2025
Crawford,SaturdayNightGenealogyFun
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/11/09/saturday-night-genealogy-fun-whats-in-a-name/

Calling all **Genea-Musings** fans!

It's **Saturday night** again — time for some more **Genealogy Fun!**

Hey boys and girls, are you ready for this week's challenge?

Here is your assignment, should you choose to accept it (you *are* reading this, so I'm guessing you really do want to play along — cue the *Mission Impossible* music!):

1. You were born and given a forename (first name and maybe a middle name) and a surname on your birth certificate. What were they?
2. How many persons appear on the **FamilySearch Family Tree** (using an exact search for your birth name) with your first name and, separately, your surname? Are there any other persons with your complete first–middle–surname?
3. How many matches do you have in the **FamilySearch Historical Records** (exact search) with your first name and, separately, with your surname? Any others with your complete first–middle–surname?
4. How many persons are in the **Ancestry Public Member Trees** (exact search) with your first name and, separately, your surname? Are there any other persons with your complete first–middle–surname?
5. How many persons are in the **Ancestry Historical Records Collections** (exact search) with your first name and, separately, your surname? Are there any others with your complete first–middle–surname?
6. Share your results in your own blog post, as a comment to this post, or on social media (Twitter or Facebook) in response to this challenge.

My Results

Name: *Marcia Jo Crawford*

FamilySearch Family Tree

- Exact for **Marcia (1526–2025)** – 859,838
- Exact for **Crawford (1526–2025)** – 3,930,348
- Exact search for **Marcia + Crawford** – 8
- Search for **Crawford** with **Marcia** (not exact, manually counted) – 26
- Exact search for **Marcia Jo Crawford** – none

FamilySearch Historical Records

- Exact for **Marcia** – 859,838
- Exact for **Crawford** – 3,591,640
- Exact for **Marcia + Crawford** – 359
- Search for **Marcia** (exact) with **Crawford** – 266,943
- Search for **Marcia** with **Crawford** (not exact) – 384
- Exact match for **Marcia Jo Crawford** – none

Ancestry Public Member Trees

- Exact for **Marcia** – 73,510
- Exact for **Crawford** – 428,646
- Exact for **Marcia + Crawford** – 41
- Search for **Marcia (exact, sounds like/similar)** and **Crawford (exact)** – 673
- Search for **Marcia (exact, sounds like/similar)** and **Crawford (exact, soundex)** – 1,144
- Exact match for **Marcia Jo Crawford** – none

Ancestry Historical Records

- Exact match for **Marcia Jo Crawford** – 263
- Exact for **Marcia** – 3,406,466
- Exact for **Crawford** – 10,142,483
- Exact for **Marcia + Crawford** – 1,948
- Search for **Marcia (exact, sounds like/similar)** and **Crawford (exact)** – 19,617
- Search for **Marcia (exact, sounds like/similar)** and **Crawford (exact, soundex)** – 31,952
- Exact match for **Marcia Jo Crawford** – 263

It's fascinating to see how my name compares to others across different databases. While both "Marcia" and "Crawford" are fairly common, the combination of my full name, "Marcia Jo Crawford," appears to be quite rare—almost unique! Exploring these numbers was a fun reminder of how our names connect us to a larger web of people, both past and present. Whether our names are shared by many or held by only a few, they each carry stories waiting to be discovered in the records we explore.

Monday's Diggings

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
November 10, 2025
Briles
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/11/10/mondays-diggings-17/

Today's find from my **BRILES** folder is a Randolph County, North Carolina deed where my third great-grandfather, **Alexander Briles**, sold land in 1857—just before his move to Kansas. Along with the original deed, I have a summary that I compiled and a hand-drawn plat of the property created by my father.

This particular record holds a special place in my collection. Not only did my father sketch the layout of the land, but he also located the deed himself—either during one of our family research trips to the Family History Library in Salt Lake City or while my parents were visiting Randolph County. It's a wonderful example of how family collaboration helps bring our ancestors' stories to life, one document at a time.

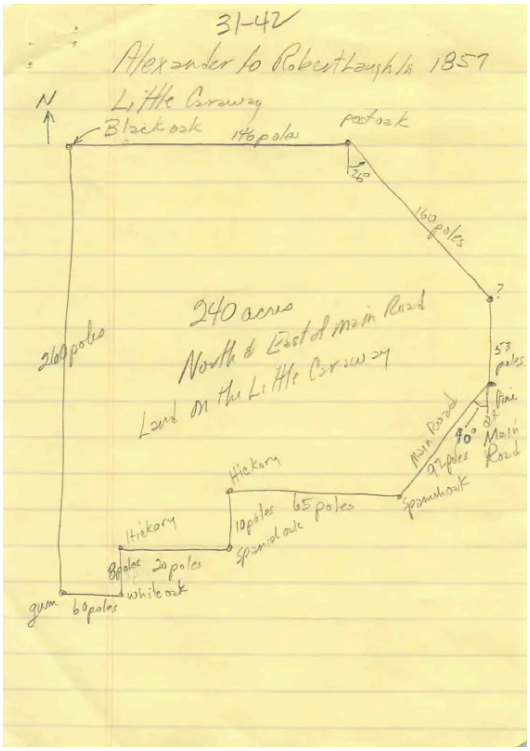
The 1857 deed provides both a legal and a geographic snapshot of Alexander Briles' life in North Carolina before his westward move. Recorded in *Book 31, page 42* of the Randolph County deeds, it details the sale of 240 acres on the waters of Little Caraway Creek to Robert Laughlin for $1,000. The language is formal and detailed, as was typical of the time, carefully describing boundary lines marked by oaks, pines, and the main road.

Below is a full transcription of the deed, followed by the plat drawing that helps visualize the land Alexander once owned.

> Randolph County, North Carolina
> Record of Deeds, 1779-1963
>
> Deeds, v. 30-32 1855-1865
> Film 470234 DGS 7560693
>
> Book 31 page 42
> Vol. 31 begins image 294
> page 4 – image 328
>
> No 47
> This Indenture, made this the first day of September in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred fifty seven; between Alexander Briles of the County of Randolph and state of North Carolina of the one part; and Robert Laughlin of the County of Randolph and State aforesaid of the other part; witnesseth that for and in consideration of the sum of one thousand dollars to him in hand paid by the said Robert Laughlin the receipt whereof is hereby acknowledged by the said Alexander Briles and hath this day Bargained and sold and delivered

unto the said Robert Laughlin a certain tract or parcel of land lying and being
on the waters of Little Caraway bounded as follows Beginning at a black oak
and running East 146 poles to a post oak, thence south 26 degrees East 160 poles to a pine
thence South 53 poles to a pine at the main Road, thence south 40 degrees west
along along the Main Road to the Creek to a spanish oak 92 poles, thence west
65 poles to a hickory, thence south 10 poles to a spanish oak thence west 20 poles
to a hickory thence south 8 poles to a white oak, thence west 60 poles to a
gum thence north 260 poles to the place of Beginning in all 240 acres be the
same more or less; Together with all woods ways waters mines minerals
and appertances there unto belonging or in anywise appertaining to him the
said Robert Laughlin his heirs and assigns to his and their own proper use
and behoof in fee simple forever and the said Alexander Briles and his
heirs and assigns shall and will warrant and forever defend from the
lawful claim or claims of any and all persons whatsoever, and lastly the
said Alexander Briles for himself his heirs executors administrators has cov
ented and agreed and by these presents doth covenant and agree to an
with the said Robert Laughlin his heirs and assigns that he the said
Alexander Briles is now at the time of Executing these presents seized
of a good sure and indefeasible estate on inheritance in the aforesaid land
and premises and that he has full power and laughful authority to
convey the same in manner and form aforesaid and that the said Robert
Laughlin his heirs and assigns shall hence forward have and hold peaceable possession
and quiet enjoyment of the same, In testimony whereof the said Alexander Briles
doth here unto set his hand and seal the date first above ritten,
Alexander Briles (seal
Signed sealed and delivered in presence of
John S. [Been]
Wm Laughlin

page 43
North Carolina
Randolph County
Court of please & quarter sessions
November Term 1857
The due execution of this deed
is duly registered execution is proved in open court by the oath of
William Laughlin one of the subscribing witnesses to the same
recorded and ordered to be registered
B. F. Hoover, CCC
(Registered November 24th 1857)



This 1857 deed marks the end of Alexander Briles' time in Randolph County and the beginning of a new chapter on the Kansas frontier. For me, it also bridges generations—linking my third great-grandfather's decision to sell his land with my father's careful work in

documenting and mapping that same property more than a century later. Each time I revisit records like this, I'm reminded that genealogy isn't just about names and dates—it's about the connections that endure across time, from one researcher's hands to the next.

Honoring Veterans

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
November 11, 2025
Uncategorized
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/11/11/honoring-veterans-2/

Today is Veteran's Day.

Previous posts have honored the veterans in my tree:

- 2015 – Honoring the Veterans in My Family
- 2019 – Honoring the Veterans in My Family
- 2021 – Veterans in My Genealogy Files
- 2023 – List of Blog Posts – Veterans in my Tree
- 2023 – Revolutionary Ancestors
- 2024 – Honoring Veterans

I have also participated in the Honor Roll Projecthttps://honorrollproject.weebly.com/.

- War Memorial
- Some Gave All – Seneca's Military Wall

During the past couple of years, I took on a project for the Nemaha County Historical Society to identify Nemaha countians who were awarded the Purple Heart. Using the local newspapers, I located articles mentioning over 300 people receiving the Purple Heart. The list of Purple Heart recipients includes links to blog posts about those who gave their lives during World War II. During the past year, AI was used to create narratives and audio overviews for each of those who gave their lives during world war 2. These veterans were honored in a series of posters on Main Street, forming a Purple Heart Walk.

Troubleshooting with AI

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
November 12, 2025
Artificial Intelligence
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/11/12/troubleshooting-with-ai/

Have you ever had to pause your genealogy research to troubleshoot a computer issue — spending hours on the phone or buried in Google searches trying to figure out what went wrong?

Recently, I found myself in that exact situation. My computer kept freezing and refusing to open programs. Because it often happened while I was using Chrome for research, I blamed Chrome. Then I suspected ChatGPT running inside Chrome. Restarting the computer fixed the issue — until the next morning, when everything froze again.

Eventually, I discovered that **Dropbox** was the true culprit. Once I realized that, I turned to my new "tech assistant," ChatGPT, for help.

I asked:

> "My computer keeps freezing. At first I thought it was caused by Chrome. Then I thought it was using ChatGPT in Chrome. Now, I think it might be Dropbox. Can you find anything about Dropbox causing computers to freeze or lock up?"

ChatGPT's detailed answer confirmed that Dropbox could indeed cause system slowdowns or lockups. That launched a longer conversation about possible solutions, and ChatGPT summarized my situation like this:

> **Summary of My Situation**
>
> - I have Microsoft 365 Family, which includes 1 TB of OneDrive storage per user.
> - My OneDrive is only 17% full — more than 830 GB of space remaining.
> - I have about 550 GB stored in Dropbox, mostly genealogy files (documents, images, scans), with some duplication.
> - My computer has been freezing, and Dropbox appears to be the cause.
> - The key question: should I migrate from Dropbox to OneDrive for better stability, performance, and cost efficiency?

From there, ChatGPT outlined a **comparison of Dropbox vs. OneDrive**, provided **reasons to consider the move**, and even created a **step-by-step migration plan.** Because some of my Dropbox files belong to the Historical Society, we also discussed keeping those on Google Drive for collaboration.

Part of the migration process involves removing duplicate files — a tedious but satisfying task. I've been working folder by folder, cleaning up duplicates before slowly migrating them to OneDrive. Thanks to our local provider, Rainbow Communications, installing fiber internet, my upload speeds are finally fast enough to make this realistic.

This project will likely take several weeks to complete, but I wouldn't have started it — or felt confident tackling it — without the help of my trusty tech assistant, ChatGPT.

Why Are You Stressing Over an “End of Line”?

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
November 13, 2025
Crawford,Research Report
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/11/13/why-are-you-stressing-over-an-end-of-line/

Have you ever used the term *“end of line”* to describe a challenge in your genealogy research? I’ve often heard and used the phrase *“brick wall”*—that frustrating point where the trail runs cold—but I don’t recall encountering *“end of line”* before.

Recently, James Tanner explored this idea in his blog post, “Why Are You Stressing Over an End-of-Line?”. His perspective prompted me to think about my own research, especially the many ways my CRAWFORD line continues to challenge me.

Why My Crawford Research Is Difficult

The record doesn’t exist.
I believe my ancestor, James Crawford, owned 50 acres of land on the Marrowbone in early Kentucky. Unfortunately, I’ve never located a deed showing the purchase or sale of this land. Without that documentation, I can’t state with certainty that the James Crawford listed in the tax records is *my* James Crawford.

Identity issues.
Too many men named James Crawford lived in the same area during the same time period. Sorting out which record belongs to which man has been—and continues to be—a significant challenge.

Maiden name barriers.
Two of my Crawford ancestors married women with the surname SMITH, but records identifying their parents have remained elusive. It’s a reminder that sometimes, even common surnames can create uncommon obstacles.

Understanding “End of Line” Research

After reading Tanner’s post, I revisited a video he published three years ago where he explains that an “end of line” occurs when we can’t provide documentation linking a child to a parent.

In that video, he offers practical encouragement for researchers who find themselves stuck:

- **Document the parent/child relationship** as completely as possible.
- **Search broadly**—use all available genealogy websites and databases to locate records.
- **Pursue descendancy research**, tracing forward from earlier generations to uncover new connections.

James Tanner's perspective is a good reminder that "end-of-line" frustrations often point us toward what's *missing* in our documentation—and that each missing link is also an invitation to explore new avenues of research.

Tanner's insights reminded me that these "end-of-line" moments aren't failures—they're signals pointing to the next step. As I continue digging into the Crawford family, I'll keep focusing on building solid parent–child connections and exploring collateral lines. Each document found, no matter how small, moves the line just a little farther forward.

Friday Find

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
November 14, 2025
Wells
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/11/14/friday-find-100/

One of the treasures shared with me is a brief biography of **William O. Wells**, found in *Homer and Its Pioneers* by P. W. Chase. Thanks to its availability on **Archive.org**, I was able to capture screenshots of the pages and use ChatGPT to create a clean transcription of the text.

> **WILLIAM O. WELLS** [portrait.]
>
> Past Commander of Gregg Post, was born in Clarendon, this county, February 4, 1845, being a son of William W. and Martha B. Wells. He removed with his father's family to this village in 1862 and in August of the same year enlisted in company A, 25th Michigan Infantry and served in the U.S. army for three years. July 3, 1866, he married Ellen O. Andrus, of Clarendon and has since been a resident of this place. He has frequently been called upon to fill official positions of trust, being an ex-village trustee, ex-township treasurer, ex-
>
> deputy sheriff of this county and in the latter capacity he was one of the best deputies Calhoun county has ever had. For a time he was in the mercantile business here and later dealt in insurance and real estate. Now and for a year or more past he has been a traveling salesman for the Pitts Agricultural Works of Buffalo, New York. He has three children: Lena D., Preston L. and Florence.

Using **Gemini AI**, I enhanced a photograph of William O. Wells that was shared with me. Below, you can see both the **original image** and the **AI-enhanced version**, which brings out more of the detail and character in his face.

This short biography and the accompanying photographs help bring **William O. Wells** to life — not just as a name in a book, but as a real person who served his country, supported his community, and built a life in Homer, Michigan. Thanks to resources like *Archive.org* and modern AI tools, we can rediscover and restore the stories and faces of those who shaped our family and local histories.

ABC Biography – Leon Russel Crawford (1894-1976)

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
November 15, 2025
ABC Biography,Crawford
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/11/15/abc-biography-leon-russel-crawford-1894-1976/

A Life Rooted in Family, Service, and the Santa Fe Railroad

Early Life and Family

Leon Russel Crawford was born on **February 6, 1894**, in **Newton, Kansas**, to **Judson Foster Crawford** and **Josie Hammond Crawford**. A local paper, *The Daily Republican* of Newton, marked his arrival with the brief notice:

> "Born—To Mr. and Mrs. J. Crawford, of Allison Street, a son."

When Leon was about five, the family moved to **Dodge City, Kansas**, where he spent the remainder of his life. Census records from 1895 through 1915 show Leon growing up alongside his siblings—**Marion Crawford**, **Hugh Crawford**, and **Lois (Crawford) Noll**—in the household of J.F. Crawford. He attended Dodge City schools and was remembered for his steady progress, with school reports from 1900–1909 documenting his education in the local public schools.

Early Career and Military Service

Before America entered World War I, Leon began working for the **Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railway (AT&SF)** as a yard helper and switchman in Dodge City. That career would become a lifelong occupation.

When the United States joined the war in 1917, Leon answered the call to serve. On **April 22, 1917**, he enlisted at the Dodge City recruiting station and departed for **Fort Logan, Colorado**, the following day. Soon after, he was assigned to the **25th Anti-Aircraft Battery, 1st Anti-Aircraft Sector**, where he served as a **wagoner and second-class gunner**.

Newspaper accounts proudly reported his service. A *Dodge City Globe* article from June 1917 described the Methodist Sunday School's "Honor Roll" that included Leon and his brother Marion, both serving in the military.

While stationed in France, Leon participated in major campaigns including the **Second Battle of the Marne** (March–May 1918) and the **Outer Defense of Paris** (June–November 1918). In a letter home published in the *Dodge City Globe*, he explained:

> "We can surely make it hot for the Huns when they come over us now… We were on some of the French '75's… We helped dismount a German plane with two of them."

After nearly two years of service, Leon returned home in March 1919. His telegram from Camp Stuart, Virginia, reassured his parents, "Arrived here all OK, am well and have written." He received an **honorable discharge** later that month at **Camp Funston, Kansas**.

Marriage and Family

On **December 24, 1919**, Leon married **Winnie Letha Currey** in Dodge City. Their wedding, held at the home of Winnie's brother, was officiated by Rev. C.M. Gray and attended by close family. The *Dodge City Daily Globe* reported:

> "Mr. Crawford… was educated here and a few months ago was discharged from an honorable service with the army in the World War. The bride is well known among the younger set here and is greatly admired by all her acquaintances."

Leon and Winnie made their home in Dodge City, where Leon resumed work with the Santa Fe Railroad. The couple had three children:

- **Betty Jean Crawford**, born and died on May 13, 1921;
- **Eugene David Crawford** (1927–2006), who later married **Roberta Adell Briles**; and
- **Leon Russel Crawford II** (1938–1961).

The young family was active in the **First United Methodist Church**, where Leon remained a lifelong member of the Baraca Sunday School class.

Career with the Santa Fe Railroad

Leon's entire career was spent with the **Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway**, beginning as a switchman and advancing to **engine foreman**. By 1935 he was supervising train yard operations in Dodge City, a role that demanded discipline and precision. His work records show a steady progression of service spanning over four decades.

In **May 1960**, after more than forty years on the railroad, Leon retired. The *Dodge City Globe* featured an article titled *"Railroad Man Retires,"* describing him "stepping down from the locomotive" while coworkers looked on. Following retirement, Leon received a **50-year veteran emblem** from the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen.

Community and Later Years

Leon and Winnie lived most of their married life at **911 Second Avenue** in Dodge City. They were well-known in the community for their church involvement and quiet hospitality. They celebrated their **Golden Wedding Anniversary** in **December 1969** with an open house at the First United Methodist Church, hosted by their son Eugene and his family.

Leon was also active in civic life, belonging to the **Veterans of Foreign Wars** and **St. Bernard Lodge No. 222 A.F. & A.M.** He was respected for his integrity, his dedication to his work, and his service to his country.

Final Years and Legacy

Leon sold the family home in 1976 and passed away later that year, on **October 3, 1976**, at **Trinity Hospital in Dodge City** at the age of 82. His obituary in the *Dodge City Globe* described him as "a resident of Dodge City almost all his life," noting his long career with the Santa Fe and his World War I service.

He was laid to rest on **October 6, 1976**, in **Maple Grove Cemetery**, beside his infant daughter and son. His wife Winnie survived him until 1992.

Historical Context

Leon's life spanned a remarkable period in American history—from the horse-drawn era to the dawn of space exploration. Born during the Gilded Age, he witnessed the transformation of transportation, serving first as a railroad switchman and later as a wartime soldier in the modern age of mechanized warfare.

The Santa Fe Railroad was the lifeblood of Dodge City, and Leon's forty-plus years there reflected both the community's economic foundation and the dependable work ethic of Kansas railroaders. His World War I service placed him among the "Doughboys" who brought the United States onto the global stage, while his lifelong connection to Dodge City reflected a generation's rootedness in faith, work, and family.

Saturday Night Genealogy Fun

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
November 16, 2025
SaturdayNightGenealogyFun,Taxes
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/11/16/saturday-night-genealogy-fun-176/

Calling all Genea-Musings fans—
It's **Saturday Night** again, which means it's time for some more **Genealogy Fun!**

Hey boys and girls, let's dive in.

Here is your assignment, should you choose to accept it (you *are* reading this, so I assume you're ready to play along—cue the **Mission Impossible** music!):

1. Review the last three or four **Best of the Genea-Blogs** posts (see Randy's archive here: https://www.geneamusings.com/search/label/BestofGeneaBlogs).
2. Pick one of the articles listed that either helped your research or your writing, touched your emotions, or simply impressed you.
3. Tell us which article you chose (and link to it), and explain why you picked it—and how it helped, touched, or inspired you.

My Pick: Using Tax Records in Genealogy Research

Since I *just* wrote a post about James Tanner's "Why Are You Stressing Over an End of Line," I decided to look for a different favorite this week. I chose **Linda Stufflebeam's** thoughtful and practical post, **"Using Tax Records in Genealogy Research."**

For anyone who hasn't dipped their toes into tax lists yet, Linda provides an excellent, approachable introduction. These records can be surprisingly rich, and her post is a great reminder of just how useful they can be.

I've returned to the same sets of tax records many times over the years. Each pass gives me something new—either confirming what I thought I knew or nudging me toward a new direction. Most of my tax-record work centers on my **CRAWFORD family in Kentucky and Virginia**, and using these lists I've been able to:

- verify that multiple men of the same name lived in the same early Kentucky area that later became Garrard County,
- confirm that two *Crawford women* owned land in Garrard County,
- track land ownership and acreage changes,
- identify (in some cases) the party from whom land was purchased,
- determine an approximate migration timeline from Virginia to Kentucky for **James Crawford**,
- locate neighbors and other landowners on the same Kentucky watercourse during the same period.

If you haven't explored tax records yet, Linda's post is an excellent place to begin!

Other Posts Now on My Reading List

Randy's weekly roundup always gives me things to think about, and there are a few posts I hadn't gotten to yet that definitely deserve a closer look—especially since they tie in with my work using AI tools in genealogy.

Here are three I plan to read more carefully and see how I might apply them to my own research and blog:

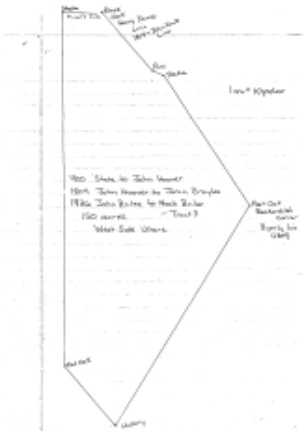
- **Immersive Genealogy with ChatGPT-5: Turning Research into "A Day in the Life" Stories by Diane Henriks on Know Who Wears the Genes In Your Family.**
- **A Continuum of AI Use in Family History by Andrew Redfern on Andrew Redfern.**
- **Crafting Better Research Prompts: A Complete Walk-through by Steve Little on AI Genealogy Insights.**

Each one touches on topics I'm already exploring—storytelling, AI tools, and ways to prompt more effective research assistance—so I'm looking forward to diving in.

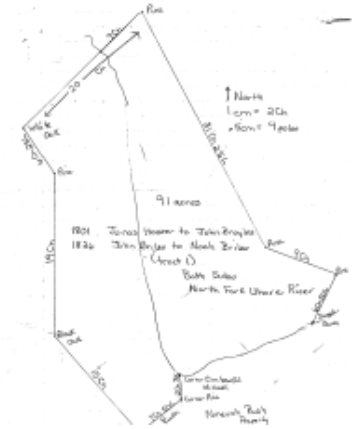
Monday's Diggings

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
November 17, 2025
Briles
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/11/17/mondays-diggings-18/

Today's find in my BRILES folder includes two hand-drawn plats depicting land that John Briles deeded to Noah Briles in 1826. One drawing represents 150 acres on the west side of the Uwharrie River, while the other shows 91 acres spanning both sides of the river's north fork.



Hand-drawn plat of 150 acres on the west side of the Uwharrie River, deeded by John Briles to Noah Briles in 1826. The drawing includes a brief history of ownership tracing the land back to Jonas Hoover.



Plat showing 91 acres lying on both sides of the North Fork of the Uwharrie River. Like the previous map, it records the chain of title from Jonas Hoover to John Briles and then to Noah Briles.

Each drawing records the “history” of the land, noting that John Briles obtained the property from Jonas Hoover, the original owner. However, neither drawing identifies the source of these transactions or explains how the plats came to be in my collection.

Using FamilySearch’s full-text search feature, I located the corresponding deed in *Randolph County, North Carolina, Deed Book 17*, beginning on page 438. Interestingly, the deed documents three separate tracts of land—yet I only have plats for two of them.

The following transcription comes from that 1826 deed recorded in *Randolph County Deed Book 17*. This document details the sale of three tracts of land from John Briles to Noah Briles—two of which correspond to the plats in my collection. The deed not only confirms the acreage and boundaries but also helps connect the chain of ownership from Jonas Hoover to John Briles and then to Noah, offering valuable insight into early Briles family land transactions in Randolph County.

> Randolph County NC
> Deeds 1826-1831
> Film 7517639
> image 232 of 502
>
> “Randolph, North Carolina, United States records,” images, FamilySearch (https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3QS7-898Q-3ZNZ?view=explore : Nov 1, 2025), image 232 of 502; . Image Group Number: 007517639
>
> Deeds, v. 17-18 1826-1831
> Vol. 17
> page 438
> This Indenture made this 4th ⎬ August in the year of our
> Lord one thousand eight hundred & twenty six Between John
> Briles of the County of Randolph & State of North Carolina of the
> one part and Noah Briles of the County and State aforesaid
> of the other part Witnesseth that for and in consideration
> of the sum of Eleven hundred Dollars to him in hand paid
> by the said Noah Briles the receipt whereof is hereby ack
> knowledged hath this day bargained sold & Delivered unto the
> said Noah Bailes & certain tract or parcel of Land lying on
> both sides of the North fork of Uhare first – Beginning at
> a pine Ninevah Rushes Corner in the line of the old
> Survey on the south side of Creek & runs thence on Ninevah
> Rushes line No 51 do – East 7 – Chains & fifty links to his
> Corner pine thence on said line No 2 chains & 70 links
> to his corner Elm in the bank of the Creek thence Down the
> Various Courses of said Creek & Crossing it to a Sweet gum in
> the North bank of the Creek , thence no 26 East 6 Chains and
> fifty links to a piece on the old line , No 70 west [9] chains
> to the old Corner pine thence on said line North 28 west 31
> chains [& fifty] 25 links to the corner pine thence on said line
> So . 45 west at 7 chains Crossing the Creeck in all 20 chains
> to the old Corner white oak thence on the said One So 35 East 6
> chains and 25 links to the old Corner pine , thence on said

line So 19 chains to the old Corner B Oak , thence south 40
east 15 chains along the old line to the Beginning Containing
91 acres – 2d Tract Beginning at a pine his old
Corner & running on his line So 45 West 20 chains to his old
Corner White oak thence on his old line So 35 Eaqr 6 chains
and 25 links to his old Corner pine thence south on said

page 439
line 19 chains to his ld Corner B[each] thence
South 40 East 15 chains on said line to a pine thence west
22 chains & six links to a black oath thence [SW] 20 West 15 chs
to a pine thence No 45 west 28chains & 50 links to corner
post oak thence East on Richard Beckerdites line 19 chains
and fifty links to the Creek Beckerdites Corner white oak on sd
line thence So and said Buckerdels line 2 chains to his
Corner B oak thence East on said line crossing theCreek 10
chains to his corner post oak thence No on said line [6 ch]
& 50 links to his corner pine thence East on said line 23 chs
to a post oak thence South bounded by Noah Rushes line
36 chains to a B oak on his line then west 13 chains
to a White oak at or near his line thence North 70 west
one Chain 50 links to his old Corner thence on his own
line the Beginning Containing one hundred and
ninety six acres – The 3rd tract Beginning at a
Post oak Beckerdites Corner & runs South 31 dg west
180 poles to a hickory in Wrays line there Bounded by [foutxehs]
line No 43 West 55 poles to a red oak thence No 245 poles
to a stake in Merrels line thence East on said line 28 poles to
a B oak in Henry Youngs line thence with his line So 40
East 50 poles to a pine thence South 65 East 8 poles to a
Stake thence to the Beginning containing one hundred
and fifty Acres – making in the three parts four hun
dred & thirty seven acres be the same more or less
together with all ways woods waters mines minerals
& appurtainances thereunto belonging or appertaining to
the said NOah Briles his heirs and assigns forever free
and Clear from all and every person or persons and
the said John Briles doth Covenant & agree to and with
the said Noah Briles to Warrant and defend the said land
to the sd Noah Briles & his heirs & assigns forever in Witness
whereof the said John Briles hath hereunto set her hand &
affixed his seal the day and date first above Written –
Signed sealed & Delivered in the presence of
Joseph Hoover

John Briles Seal

page 440
State of North Carolina
Randolph County
Court of pelas & quarter Sessions
May Term 1829
The execution of this deed was proven in open Court
by Joseph Hoover & ordered to be registered
Registered July 28th 1829
Jesse Harper CCC

While I may be missing one of the plats mentioned in the deed, the surviving drawings and this record together help tell the story of how Briles family land passed from one generation to the next. These documents not only trace property boundaries but also reveal the connections between families and neighbors along the Uwharrie River. Each deed and plat adds another layer to understanding the movements and relationships of the Briles family before their later migrations westward—proof that even partial records can provide valuable clues in reconstructing our ancestors' lives.

Exploring Leon Crawford's Story through AI-Created Media

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
November 18, 2025
Crawford
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/11/18/exploring-leon-crawfords-story-through-ai-created-media/

The life of **Leon Russel Crawford (1894–1976)**—railroad man, World War I veteran, and lifelong Dodge City resident—continues to inspire reflection on service, perseverance, and family. To bring his story to life in a new way, two creative tools were used to reinterpret his biography through sound and image.

The **first video** features an *audio overview* generated with **Google Notebook LM**, which transforms the narrative of Leon's life into an engaging spoken summary. That audio was then combined with visuals in **Canva** to create a short video presentation.

https://youtube.com/watch?v=fahgCapLMRY

The **second video** presents an *original song* about Leon, composed with **Suno.com**, an AI music generator that captures the rhythm and spirit of his Kansas roots and railroad years. This song was also transformed into a visual story through Canva.

https://youtube.com/watch?v=TFZrZoaxtrE

Together, these two AI-enhanced creations offer a modern tribute—blending history, technology, and storytelling—to celebrate the life and legacy of Leon Russel Crawford.

These videos offer just a glimpse into Leon Crawford's remarkable journey—from his early days in Dodge City to his years of service overseas and his lifelong career with the Santa Fe Railroad. His story is one of quiet dedication, faith, and perseverance—values that shaped not only his own life but also the generations that followed. The biography below shares more about the man behind the music and narration, preserving his legacy in both words and history.

Adding Substack Feeds to Feedly

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
November 19, 2025
Substack
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/11/19/substack-and-feedly/

Have you noticed the growing trend of genealogists using **Substack** to share their research journeys? I love seeing others write about their discoveries and methods—but I'm not a fan of having to **subscribe** to yet another newsletter just to stay up to date. My inbox is already overflowing with unread subscriptions!

Instead, I rely on **Feedly** to keep up with a wide variety of genealogy blogs. Each morning, I scan my Feedly feed and read the posts that catch my attention. It's an easy, organized way to stay connected with the genealogy world—without cluttering my inbox.

Recently, I discovered that **Randy Seaver** of *Genea-Musings* has joined Substack. Naturally, I wanted to add his posts to my Feedly account. Feedly does allow users to add newsletters directly—but only with its **Pro+ subscription plan** (which comes at a cost). Since I wasn't eager to upgrade, I wondered if there was another way to follow Substack posts through Feedly.

So, I asked **ChatGPT**.

✅ How to Add a Substack Feed to Feedly

1. **Find the Substack publication's RSS feed.**
   Most Substack publications have a feed URL that follows this format: `https://<publication-name>.substack.com/feed` (You can confirm this in Substack's own documentation.)
2. **Add it to Feedly.**
   In Feedly, click **"+ Add Content"** (or the **"+"** icon) and paste that feed URL. You can also search for the publication name.
3. **Start reading!**
   Once added, new posts from that Substack will appear in your Feedly feed—just like any other blog or website you follow.

⚠️ A Few Things to Note

- This method works for **public** Substack posts. Paid or subscriber-only content won't appear in Feedly.
- If you get an error when adding the URL, double-check the address—especially for Substacks with custom domains.
- Feedly's own documentation confirms that this is a supported method for following Substack writers without the Pro+ plan.

Success!

Following those steps, I found Randy Seaver's Substack address, added "/feed" to the end of the URL, and pasted it into Feedly. It worked perfectly! Now, I can read *Genea-Musings* and a few other genealogy Substacks right alongside my favorite blogs—all in one place.

With so many new platforms popping up, it's nice to know there's still a simple way to keep everything in one place. By adding Substack feeds directly to Feedly, I can follow my favorite genealogy writers without cluttering my inbox or juggling multiple apps. Whether it's Randy Seaver's *Genea-Musings* or another Substack author sharing research tips, Feedly keeps me connected to the ever-growing online genealogy community—on my own terms.

Revisiting the Anderson – Maxwell – Crawford Connection

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
November 20, 2025
Anderson,Madison County
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/11/20/revisiting-the-anderson-maxwell-crawford-connection/

Untangling the Anderson Connection: Was John Anderson the Son of Rev. James Anderson?

Genealogical research is rarely a straight path—it often circles back on itself as new evidence or unexpected DNA results emerge. Lately, a few intriguing **Maxwell DNA matches** have pulled me back into the tangled web of **Crawford, Anderson, and Maxwell** families that intersect in early Kentucky. What began as a search for the source of those matches has led me to reexamine one long-standing assumption found in the *Maxwell History and Genealogy*: that **Rev. James Anderson of Donegal, Pennsylvania**, was the father of **John Anderson of Madison County, Kentucky**. Modern researchers—and genetic evidence—suggest that this connection may not hold up under closer scrutiny.

Following the DNA Trail

Like many genealogists, I sometimes revisit older research when a DNA result raises new questions. In this case, my **Maxwell DNA connections** stood out because I have no known Maxwell ancestors. Since **Rebecca Anderson**, wife of **James Crawford**, was reportedly married to a Maxwell before her marriage to James, I initially assumed the connection might come through her. A Crawford DNA link would make sense—but a Maxwell one does not.

This mystery sent me retracing my earlier **CRAWFORD FAN Club** (Friends, Associates, and Neighbors) work. I began looking again at Rebecca Anderson and her children, including her son **John Anderson**, to see whether the Maxwell surname appeared anywhere in their records.

The Maxwell History and Genealogy

That review led me back to the *Maxwell History and Genealogy*, a book that devotes several pages to **Rev. James Anderson** and his descendants. The author identifies **John Anderson of Madison County, Kentucky**, as one of Rev. James's sons, placing him within a well-documented clerical and Presbyterian lineage that originated in Scotland and Pennsylvania.

However, other researchers—both on **FamilySearch** and **WikiTree**—disagree. They note that Rev. James Anderson's son **John** reportedly died young, long before the Virginia and Kentucky migrations began. If correct, that would mean the John Anderson who

later settled along Silver Creek in Madison County could not be the same individual described in the book.

A Deed That Raises New Questions

Fortunately, WikiTree pointed me toward an important document linking some of John Anderson's children in Kentucky to **land once owned by a James Anderson in Augusta County, Virginia**. This discovery provided the first clear written connection between the Kentucky Andersons and their Virginia roots.

> /Madison County Kentucky
> Deeds
>
> "Madison, Kentucky, United States records," images, FamilySearch (https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C3MJ-JS9T-7?view=explore : Nov 12, 2025), image 96 of 812; . Image Group Number: 008452466
>
> Film 8452466
>
> Know all men by these presents that we James Anderson
> Isaac Anderson William Anderson John Anderson Samuel
> Campbell & Mary his wife late Mary Anderson William M
> Morrison and Elizabeth his wife late Elizabeth Anderson of
> the County of Madison and State of Kentucky and John
> Gass (representative of Ann his wife late Ann Anderson decd
> of the County of Bourbon and State aforesaid do hereby con
>
> stitute and appoint Chapman Johnson Esqr of the County of
> Augusta and State of Virginia our attorney at Law forms
> to ask demand and receive all the Estate we hold in two
> hundred acres of Land which lies in the said County of Augusta on
> the long glade as Heir at Law to our grand father James
> Anderson decd late of the said County of Augusta and also
> to bring suit or suits in Law and equity and prosecute the
> same as our Attorney at law in all and every manner for
> the purpose of recovering the same and all things lawful
> -ly done by our said attorney we will and do hereby
>
> 168
> ratify and confirm . In Testimony whereof we have
> hereunto Set our hands and Seals this 12th day of June 1811
> Teste James Barnett
> John Wallace
> William BOttesworth
> Thomas Clark
>
> James Anderson
> Isaac Anderson
> William Anderson
> John Anderson
> Saml Campbell
> Mary Campbell
> John Gass
> Wm M Morrison
> Betsey Morrison
>
> State of Kentucky
> Madison County
> I do hereby Certify that this
> Power of attorney was produced to me as Clerk of the Court
> for the County aforesaid on the 7th day of August 1811
> which was acknowledged by James Anderson Isaac
> Anderson William Anderson John Anderson , Samuel
> Campbell . Mary Campbell John Gass William M.
> Morrison and Betsey Morrison to be their act and deed
> and the same has been duly Recorded in my official ~
>
> In Testimony whereof I William Irvin
> Clerk of the Court for the County aforesd
> have hereunto subscribed my name and
> affixed the Seal of said County this 8th day
> of August 1811
> Will Irvine

This deed identifies **James Anderson** as the grandfather of several of John's children, but it does not specify which James Anderson it refers to. Was it Rev. James Anderson of Donegal, Pennsylvania? Or was it another James Anderson—perhaps a Virginian contemporary—whose records have yet to be fully explored?

Where the Evidence Stands

At this point, the evidence remains mixed. The *Maxwell History and Genealogy* preserves a valuable early tradition linking the Madison County family to Rev. James Anderson, but other records—and the silence of FamilySearch and WikiTree on that connection—suggest a need for caution. The Madison County deed provides an exciting clue, but it stops short of naming the correct James Anderson.

Further research—particularly a close study of **Augusta County land and probate records**, combined with DNA evidence from verified Anderson descendants—may eventually reveal which James Anderson fathered **John Anderson of Madison County, Kentucky**.

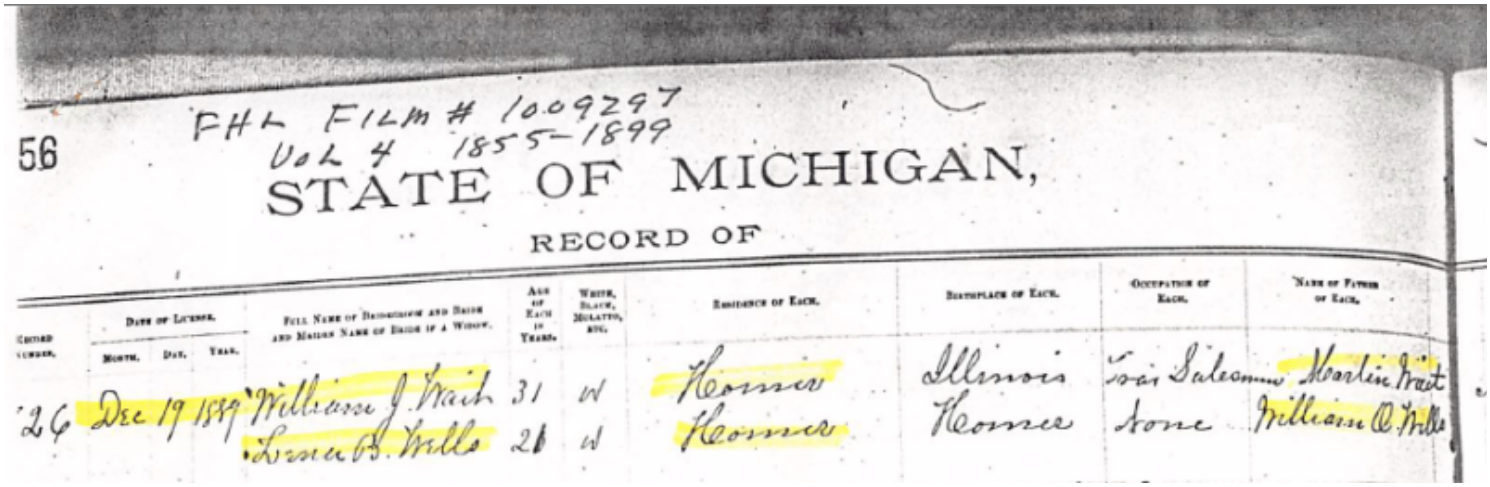
Closing Thoughts

For now, I'm leaving the question open. As so often happens in genealogy, new information may shift long-accepted conclusions. Whether or not Rev. James Anderson proves to be John Anderson's father, exploring this tangled web of families has already deepened my understanding of the connections between the **Andersons, Crawfords, and Maxwells**—and how a few DNA matches can reopen centuries-old questions.

Friday Find

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
November 21, 2025
Wells
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/11/21/friday-find-101/

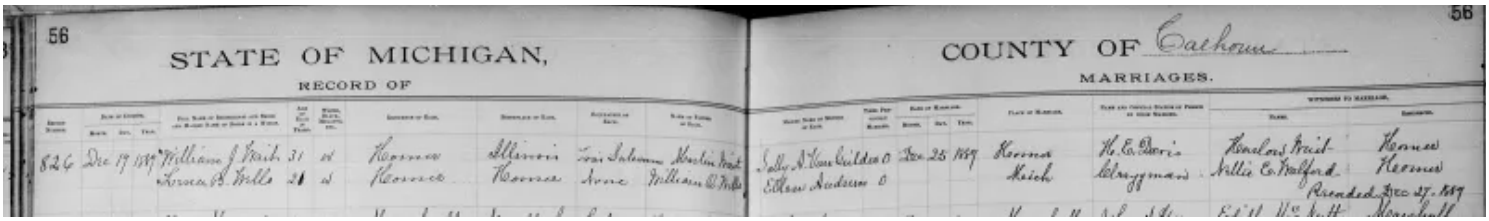
Today's find in my **WELLS** notebook is a Michigan marriage record for **Lena B. Wells** and her husband, **William J. Wait**. I received this record years ago from a generous Michigan researcher who helpfully noted the **Family History Library (FHL) film number** on the copy.


FHL FILM # 1009297
Vol 4 1855-1899
56
STATE OF MICHIGAN,
RECORD OF
Dec 19 1879
William J. Wait 31 W Homer Illinois Farmer Merlin Wait
Lena B. Wells 21 W Homer Homer None William A. Wells

Armed with that number, I searched the **FamilySearch catalog** and discovered that the film belonged to the **Calhoun County, Michigan marriage records**. Near the top of the catalog page were two useful links:

- *An index for Michigan Civil Marriages is available online — click here*
- *Michigan, County Marriages are available online — click here*

Curious, I searched both online indexes but **did not find Lena Wells' marriage record** in either one. So, I returned to my original source information and used the **digitized microfilm** listed in the catalog. With the **volume and page number** from my copy, I was able to locate the **actual entry** for Lena and William.


56

STATE OF MICHIGAN,

RECORD OF

COUNTY OF Calhoun

MARRIAGES.

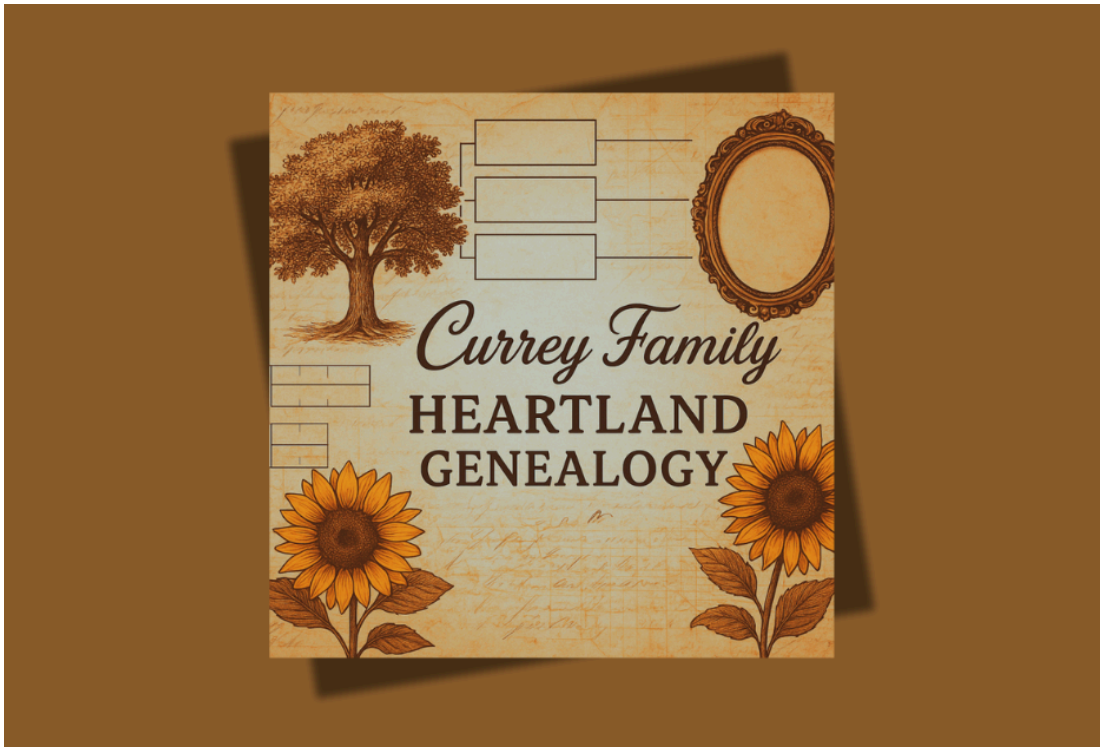
56

Michigan, Calhoun County. Marriage records, 1836-1943. Film #1009297 DGS 4653764. Lena b Wells, 19 Dec 1889; Vol. 4: page 56; 143 of 446, digitized images, FamilySearch.org http://www.familysearch.org : viewed online 1 November 2025.

Because this record was not included in the indexed collections, **it wasn't automatically attached to Lena Wells** in FamilySearch. I've now corrected that oversight and **attached the record to her profile**, preserving this important documentation for future researchers.

ABC Biography: Winnie Letha Currey

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
November 22, 2025
ABC Biography,Currey
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/11/22/abc-biography-winnie-letha-currey/



Today's **ABC Biography** features **Winnie Letha Currey**, a woman whose life reflects both resilience and grace. Born in 1903 in Lansing, Kansas, Winnie's early years took her from small-town beginnings to life in a Kansas City children's home before she built a lasting home in Dodge City. Through her marriage to **Leon Russel Crawford** and her deep involvement in church and community organizations, Winnie exemplified the strength and devotion of early twentieth-century Kansas women. Her story—woven with love, loss, and perseverance—reminds us how family ties and quiet determination shaped the generations that followed.

Biography of Winnie Letha (Currey) Crawford (1903–1992)
Early Life

Winnie Letha Currey was born on June 30, 1903, in Lansing, Leavenworth County, Kansas. She was the daughter of Hiram Miles Currey and Winifred Mae "Winnie" (Hutchinson) Currey.

In the 1905 Kansas State Census, two-year-old Winnie appeared in her parents' household in Lansing. By 1910, the family had moved west to Twin Mound Township, Rooks County, Kansas, where six-year-old Winnie was again listed with her parents.

Her childhood took a dramatic turn in 1914, when she lived in a children's home in Kansas City, Missouri. Despite those challenges, she went on to complete her education at the Horace Mann School in Kansas City, graduating in 1916. The following year, she lived with her Aunt Nora in North Kansas City, Clay County, Missouri, and worked in a factory, demonstrating an early sense of independence and determination.

Marriage and Family

Winnie married Leon Russel Crawford on December 24, 1919, in Dodge City, Kansas, at the home of her brother on Military Avenue. The ceremony was officiated by Reverend C. M. Gray and witnessed by close family members. A newspaper notice described her as “well known among the younger set and greatly admired by her acquaintances.”

Leon was the son of Judson Foster Crawford and Mary McGhee, a lifelong resident of Dodge City who had recently returned home after World War I military service.

The couple made their first home on Avenue A in Dodge City, where they were recorded in the 1920 census. Their early years together were filled with both joy and heartbreak.

Children

Winnie and Leon were the parents of three children:

- Betty Jean Crawford — born May 13, 1921, in Dodge City. Sadly, the infant lived only about an hour and was buried the following day at Maple Grove Cemetery.
- Eugene David Crawford — born December 8, 1927, in Dodge City. Eugene grew up there, later serving in the U.S. Navy during World War II, becoming an educator, and eventually passing away in Emporia, Kansas, on September 14, 2006. He married Roberta Adell Briles in 1951.
- Leon Russel Crawford II — born November 10, 1938, at Charlotte Murray Memorial Hospital in Dodge City. Known as “Leon Jr.,” he excelled academically, receiving awards in spelling, debate, and theatre, and was active in the KAY Club and Thespian Society. He graduated from Dodge City High School in 1956 and from Kansas State Teachers College of Emporia in 1960. He was pursuing doctoral work in radiology at the University of Wisconsin when he died unexpectedly on February 10, 1961, at age 22. He rests beside his parents at Maple Grove Cemetery in Dodge City.

Life in Dodge City

From the time of her marriage, Dodge City remained Winnie’s lifelong home. The Crawfords lived at several addresses—including 510 Avenue G in the 1920s and 512 Avenue G during the 1930s and 1940s—before settling at 911 Second Avenue in later years.

Winnie was a devoted homemaker and community member. She belonged to several civic and fraternal organizations, including the First United Methodist Church, the Order of the Eastern Star, the Social Order of the Beauceant, and both the Veterans of Foreign Wars and American Legion Auxiliaries.

From 1953 to 1958, she worked for Eckles Department Store in Dodge City, a position that connected her to many residents and reflected her dedication to both family and community life.

Later Years

Winnie remained active well into her later years. She received her Social Security number in 1953, traveled to Taos, New Mexico, and Arizona in 1959, and continued to maintain close relationships with her extended Currey family—attending a family reunion in Sedona, Arizona, in 1964.

She was honored with a 50-year membership pin from the St. Bernard Chapter No. 97 of the Order of the Eastern Star around 1970, recognizing her lifelong involvement in the organization.

Following Leon's death in 1976, Winnie granted power of attorney to her son Eugene and continued to reside at 1914 Central Avenue. She carefully arranged for her own memorial, purchasing her tombstone in 1978.

Winnie passed away on February 11, 1992, at the age of 88, in Dodge City. She was buried beside her husband and sons in Maple Grove Cemetery. Her funeral was conducted by Hulpieu-Swaim Funeral Home, with services led by Rev. Harold P. Cooper.

Historical Context

Winnie's life spanned nearly the entire twentieth century—an era that saw remarkable social and technological change. Born at a time when horse-drawn carriages still rolled through Kansas streets, she lived to see men walk on the moon. Her story reflects the experiences of many Midwestern women of her generation: perseverance through loss, deep ties to community, and quiet strength built through faith, family, and service.

Conclusion

From her early days in Lansing to her final years in Dodge City, **Winnie Currey Crawford's** life tells the story of a woman who faced hardship with quiet courage and built a legacy of love, family, and service. Whether through her work, her devotion to community organizations, or her steadfast support of those around her, Winnie embodied the values of perseverance and kindness that define so many Kansas families. Her story not only connects the past to the present but also reminds us of the enduring strength found in everyday lives well lived.

Saturday Night Genealogy Fun

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
November 23, 2025
Thompson
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/11/23/saturday-night-genealogy-fun-177/

Calling All Genea-Musings Fans!

It's **Saturday Night** again —
time for some more **Genealogy Fun**!

Hey boys and girls, it's time to play along once more.

Here is your assignment, should you choose to accept it (you *are* reading this, so I assume you really want to play along — cue the Mission Impossible music!):

1. **Who is Number 100 in your ahnentafel list?** Tell us about him.
   {If you don't have a #100, choose another number.}
2. **How do you descend from #100?**

My #100: John Thompson

Number 100 in my ahnentafel is **John Thompson**, one of my 4th great-grandfathers on my mother's side. As part of this week's challenge, I decided to feature him and share an "ABC Biography" created from my RootsMagic narrative report. I asked ChatGPT to turn that narrative into a readable, family-friendly biography, and the result is below.

Biography of John Thompson (1797–1857)

Introduction

John Thompson's life reflects the American frontier experience—beginning in Kentucky, moving into Indiana, and finally settling in Iowa. Over the course of his life, he trained as a blacksmith, farmed, bought and sold land, raised a large family, and adapted to the opportunities of a rapidly shifting early-19th-century America.

Early Life

John was born **4 March 1797 in Kentucky**. Records from his teen years tell us that in **1810** he was apprenticed to George Brown in Ohio County, Kentucky. By **1811**, he began another apprenticeship—this time with John Taylor—to learn the valuable frontier trade of **blacksmithing**.

Young Adult Years in Kentucky

Throughout the early 1820s, John's name appears regularly on the **Ohio County tax lists**, marking him as a young man establishing his place in the community. The 1820 census lists a young couple in his household, which fits perfectly with his marriage that same year.

Marriage and Family

John married **Sarah Iglehart** on **1 February 1820** in Ohio County, Kentucky. Sarah, born in Maryland in 1800, was the daughter of **Jacob Iglehart** and **Ann Beall**. The couple raised a large family as they moved west, with children born in Kentucky, Indiana, and Iowa. Their children included:

- **William T. Thompson** (1820–1898), m. Polly Ann Evans
- **Jacob Thompson** (1822–1905), m. Rhoda Evans
- **Benjamin Franklin Thompson** (1824–1875), m. Catherine Black
- **Levi I. Thompson** (1826–1828)
- **Martha Jane Thompson** (1828–1848), m. Alexander Van Winkle
- **Andrew J. Thompson** (b. 1832)
- **Mary Elizabeth Thompson** (1834–1917), m. Henry Evans
- **John L. "John Lou" Thompson** (1836–1917), m. Martha Ingersoll
- **Francis Marion Thompson** (1838–1921), m. Martha Schooling
- **Sarah Ellen Thompson** (1841–1844)

- **James Allen Thompson** (1841–1868), m. Margaret Scott

Land, Work, and Frontier Movement

Indiana Years

Beginning in **1829**, John and Sarah began purchasing land in **Warrick County, Indiana**. Over several years they accumulated multiple tracts—40, 50, and even 80 acres. Several of their children were born during their time in Indiana.

Move to Iowa

By **1844**, the Thompsons had moved to **Wapello County, Iowa**, part of the wave of settlers arriving just before Iowa's statehood in 1846. John appears as a **53-year-old farmer owning $2500 in real estate** in the 1850 census. By 1856, he is listed as a **merchant**, suggesting he shifted careers later in life.

Final Years and Death

John died **14 August 1857** in **Adams County, Iowa** and is buried in **Forest Hill Cemetery** in Mount Etna. Sarah survived him by many years, appearing in the 1860 census with considerable real estate, and died in **1877** (or possibly 1884, depending on the source). She is buried beside him.

Historical Notes

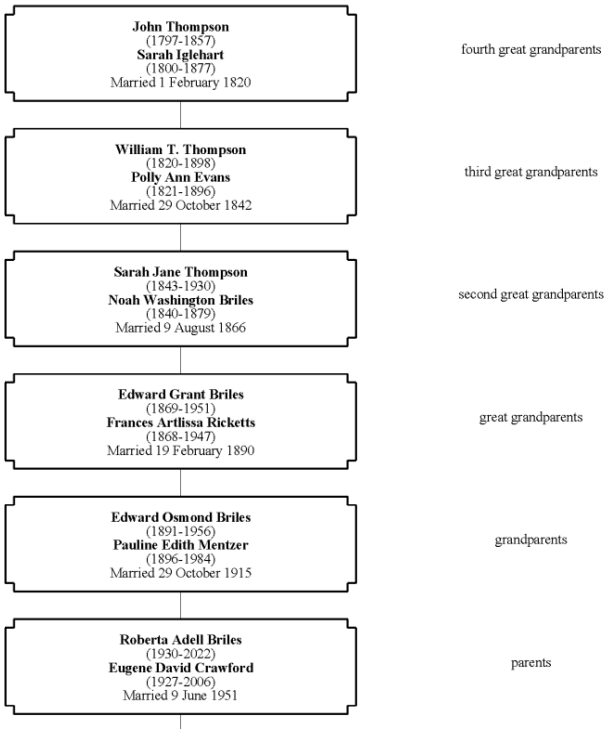
- John was born during the nation's early post-Revolutionary years, when Kentucky was still a developing frontier.
- His westward movement—from Kentucky to Indiana to Iowa—mirrors the broader patterns of American migration.
- His blacksmith training gave him a crucial frontier skill.
- His Indiana land purchases align with federal policies opening western territories for settlement.
- The family arrived in Iowa just as it transitioned from territory to state.

Conclusion

John Thompson lived a classic early American frontier life—building skills, raising a family, acquiring and selling land, and continually moving toward new opportunities. His story fits beautifully into the broader narrative of American expansion and settlement.

How I Descend From John Thompson

My RootsMagic software makes this wonderfully easy by generating a relationship diagram. Below is a descendancy chart tracing John Thompson down to my mother, showing exactly how I descend from my ahnentafel #100.



Conclusion

Tracing my ahnentafel back to number 100 turned out to be a fun reminder of just how many stories sit quietly in our family trees waiting to be rediscovered. John Thompson's life—stretching across Kentucky, Indiana, and Iowa—captures the spirit of the American frontier and gives me a deeper appreciation for the choices and challenges that shaped our family long before my time. I enjoyed digging into his story for this week's challenge, and I'm grateful for the way these SNGF prompts encourage us to look beyond names and dates to the real people behind them. I'm already looking forward to seeing who others found in their own trees!

Monday's Diggings: Jacob Briles Grant

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
November 24, 2025
Briles,Randolph County, NC
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/11/24/mondays-diggings-jacob-briles-grant/

Continuing my exploration through the BRILES folder, today's discovery is a Randolph County, North Carolina deed involving **Jacob Briles**, the son of my fourth great-grandparents, **John Briles and Nancy Beckerdite**—and thus my third great-granduncle.

This document records the **grant of fifty acres of land on the waters of the Uharie River** from the **State of North Carolina** to Jacob Briles. As with many early North Carolina land grants, it offers a glimpse into the family's settlement patterns and the gradual expansion of their holdings in Randolph County.

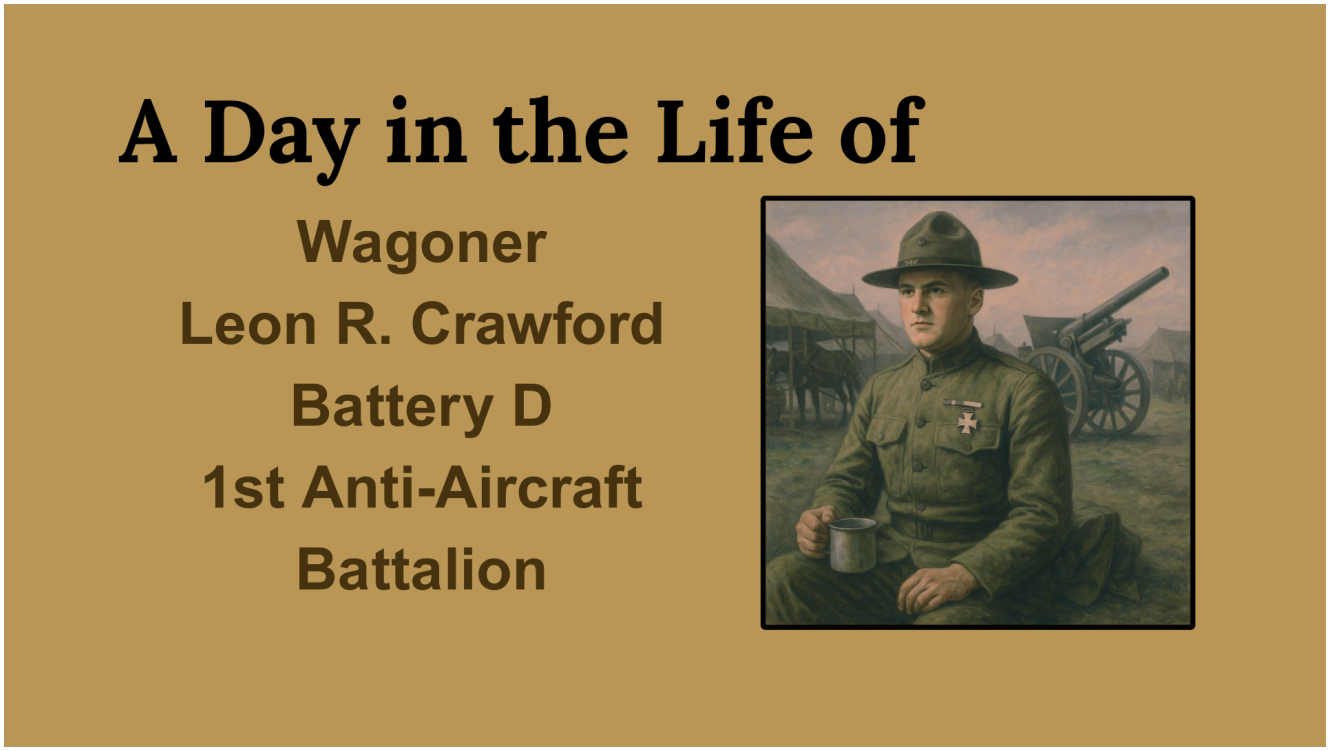
> Randolph. Deeds 1796-1822
>
> "Randolph, North Carolina, United States records," images, FamilySearch (https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3QS7-898Q-33Q3?view=explore : Nov 8, 2025), image 484 of 514; . Image Group Number: 007517636
>
> image 484 of 514
>
> page 413
> State of North Carolina , No . 2351
> To all to whom these presents shall come greeting :
> Know ye , That We , for and in consideration of the
> sum of Fifty shillings for every hundred acres hereby
> granted paid into our treasury by Jacob Briles
> have given and granted , and by these presents do give and
> grant unto the said Jacob Briles a tract of land
> containing fifty acres , lying
> and being in the County of Randolph on the Waters
> of Uharie Begins On a Black Oak Said
> Briles corner running North 28 Chs
> & 75 links to a stake then Et 15 Chs to
> A Gum then South 20 chs to a state in
> Jacob Ouis line then a straight line to the
> Beginning
> Entered the 18th April 1810
> as by the plat hereunto annexed doth appear ; together with
> all woods , waters , mines , minerals , hereditaments , and appur

tenances to the said land belonging or appertaining . To
HOLD to the said Jacob Briles – his heirs
and assigns forever : Yielding and paying to us such sums of
money , yearly , or otherwise , as our General assembly from
time to time may direct . Provided always , That the said
grantee shall cause this grant to be registered in the Register ‘ s
Office of our said County of Randolph within 12 months from
the date hereof , otherwise the same shall be void & of no effect .
In testimony whereof , We have caused these our letters to
be made patent and our great seal to be hereunto affixed.
Witness ,Will Miller Esquire , our Governer ,
Captain General and Commander in Chief , at Raleigh , the
12 day of Decr in the 41th year of our indepen
dence , & in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred
& Sixteen
by command Wm Hill [Lutz]
Will Miller

This land grant helps place **Jacob Briles** firmly within the community of early settlers along the Uharie River, an area that was home to several members of the extended Briles family. Deeds like this one not only trace land ownership but also help map family connections, migration paths, and the gradual establishment of a life on the North Carolina frontier. Each document adds another piece to the story of how the Briles family laid down roots that would extend westward in the generations to come.

A Day in the Life of Leon Crawford

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
November 25, 2025
Artificial Intelligence,Crawford
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/11/25/ai-related/



Thanks to a gentle nudge from the ever-creative Randy Seaver of **Genea-Musings**, I recently revisited several AI-related genealogy posts I had bookmarked. One in particular—**"Immersive Genealogy with ChatGPT-5: Turning Research into 'A Day in the Life' Stories"** by Diane Henriks on *Know Who Wears the Genes in Your Family*—caught my attention again. Diane walks readers through how to use AI to transform dry historical facts into rich, immersive narratives that bring ancestors to life.

Inspired by her step-by-step suggestions, I decided to try the process for one of my own relatives: **Leon R. Crawford**, my World War I ancestor. I used Diane's suggested structure and created the following prompt to feed into ChatGPT:

The Prompt I Used

Write a detailed "Day in the Life" story for Leon Crawford between 1918 and 1919 while he was serving in the U.S. Army, based on the following information. (Anything in italics is quoted from a source.)

- **22 Apr 1917** – Reported to the recruiting station in Dodge City.
- **22 Apr 1917** – Departed for Ft. Logan, Colorado.
  - *The Dodge City Globe* (21 April 1917) reported:
    "Leon R. Crawford enlisted for artillery service and will go to Ft. Logan tomorrow…"
- **26 Apr 1917** – Began military service; appointed wagoner, 2nd class gunner, 25th A.A. Battery, 1st A.A. Sector.
- **Jun 1917** – Honored by the Methodist Sunday School for military service, along with his brother Marion.
  - *Dodge City Globe*: *"Twenty-three Dodge City boys have joined the army… Among those honored were Leon Crawford and his brother, Marion Crawford."*
- **Nov 1917** – Stationed at Ft. Barry, San Francisco.
- **Jan 1918** – Mailing address listed as 14th Co., Anti-Aircraft Battalion of San Francisco, AEF, via New York.
- **Mar–May 1918** – Served at St. Mihiel during the buildup to the Second Battle of the Marne.
  - In a published letter home, Leon wrote:
    "We can surely make it hot for the Huns… We helped dismount a German plane with two of them."
- **28 Jun–8 Nov 1918** – Served as wagoner in the outer defenses of Paris.
- **20 Feb 1919** – Departed France aboard the **U.S.S. Ohio**.
- **15 Mar 1919** – Telegram to parents from Camp Stuart, VA:
  "Arrived here all OK am well and have written."
- **28 Mar 1919** – Received honorable discharge at Camp Funston, Kansas.
- **10 Apr 1919** – Returned home to Dodge City.

- *Dodge City Journal*: *"Leon Crawford… was in several of the severe engagements on the western front but escaped without injury."*

The final instruction was:

Use historically accurate details about the time period, location, and occupation to make the scene vivid. Blend the documented facts with realistic daily activities for that era, but avoid adding major fictional events. Keep the tone immersive and narrative, as if the reader is experiencing the day alongside the person. Include sensory details (sounds, smells, sights) and interactions with family or community.

What ChatGPT Produced

Using this prompt, ChatGPT generated the following immersive historical narrative:

A Day in the Life of Wagoner Leon R. Crawford — France, 1918

The morning began before the sun thought to rise. A thin fog clung to the French fields near the outer defenses of Paris, the kind of mist that muffled sound and carried the sharp scent of damp earth and coal smoke from the nearby encampment. Wagoner **Leon R. Crawford**, Battery D, 1st Anti-Aircraft Battalion, rolled from his blankets at the first call of the bugle—a sound he had long ago learned to wake to before the final note.

It was late summer of **1918**, during his months serving in the **outer defenses of Paris (28 June–8 November 1918)**. His hands were already roughened by a year of military service that had begun far from this place: the dusty recruiting office in **Dodge City**, the train west to **Fort Logan**, the coastal winds of **Fort Barry** near San Francisco, and finally the long, anxious crossing to France. Now he moved with the steady rhythm of someone who had survived the spring months near **St. Mihiel**, hauling ammunition and supplies amid the thunder of artillery and the whine of enemy aircraft. Compared to those days, this shallow dawn around Paris felt nearly peaceful.

Nearly.

The Morning Routine

Leon brushed the last of the straw from his uniform and stepped outside the tent. The world smelled of woodsmoke, wet canvas, and yesterday's spilled gasoline. A few men were already leading the horses to the watering line—massive draft animals that powered much of the Anti-Aircraft Battalion's work. Though they served next to machines and large guns, the battalion still depended on teams of horses to haul ammunition, spare parts, and the French **75-millimeter guns** he had written home about.

He greeted one of the men with a familiar nod.

"Morning, Crawford," the soldier muttered, rubbing sleep from his eyes. "Looks like fog's thick enough to keep the Huns grounded."

"Fine by me," Leon replied, tugging his jacket closed against the chill. "We gave them enough to think about back at St. Mihiel."

He didn't say it boastfully. It was the tone of someone recounting a job done, not bragging. Still, he remembered it well: their battery firing rapidly, the French 75s kicking up dirt as the crews worked at a pace so fast the barrels ran hot. *We helped dismount a German plane with two of them*, he had written proudly to his mother—a letter published back home in the **Dodge City Globe**.

The cook tent rattled with pans. A line began to form: tin cups ready for black coffee strong enough to wake the dead, and a ladle of oatmeal or hardtack if supplies were thin. Leon accepted both with gratitude, then found a place on an overturned crate beside two gunners.

"Mail call today?" one of them asked.

"Maybe," Leon said. "Haven't heard since July. Too much moving around, I guess."

He did not say how much he treasured every envelope bearing his mother's careful handwriting or the Methodist class's honor roll news. Back in June 1917 they had unveiled a tribute at church, bouquets laid on the list of volunteers. His name and Marion's—*both* Crawford boys—had been spoken in front of neighbors who knew them since childhood. He carried that memory like armor.

Midday: The Work of a Wagoner

By midmorning, the fog thinned enough for the day's duties. Leon checked harnesses, inspected wheel rims, and tightened bolts on the wagons assigned to Battery D. The guns needed constant feed: crates of shells, spare gears, sandbags, and food for the crews. Even when he wasn't directly working the guns, he stayed close enough to hear the bark of firing drills or the grinding spin of searchlight generators.

A sergeant strode over, clipboard in hand.

“Crawford, you’re taking two loads to the northern emplacement. Roads are rough — rain last night.”

Leon gave a short nod, already turning toward his team. “Yes, Sergeant. I’ll take Corporal Miller with me.”

The route wound past farmhouses scarred by shrapnel and fields trampled by months of troop movement. Civilians emerged from doorways to watch the column pass, some raising a hand in tired gratitude. Children, braver than adults, waved from behind stone walls.

Leon tipped his cap to them. Even after months in France, small gestures of kindness steadied him.

At the gun site, the men welcomed the delivery with relief. The air smelled of gun oil, hot metal, and trampled grass. One of the gunners clapped Leon on the shoulder.

“Good timing. Rumor is the Boche tried a night raid east of here. They might send scouts again.”

Leon simply said, “Then let’s keep you supplied.”

The anti-aircraft teams were weary but sharp. The large AA guns—some American, some French—pointed permanently skyward, their crews trained to swing into action at the faintest hum of an aircraft. Even in downtime, ears stayed tuned for the distant buzz of an engine.

Afternoon: A Rare Pause

By late afternoon, the supply wagons were empty and the horses watered again. Leon’s stomach growled as he settled on a low stone wall near camp to eat preserved meat and a stale biscuit. A few men played cards, shuffling worn decks. Another whittled a tiny wooden brooch to send home to his sweetheart.

Leon pulled from his pocket a sheet of paper and pencil stub—paper was precious, but moments like this were rarer still. He began a letter to his mother:

> *“Dear Mother,
>
> We are still helping hold the defenses of Paris. You’d be proud of the men—they are steady under pressure, and the big guns give the Huns plenty to think about…”*

He paused to listen as a distant church bell rang across the French countryside. He wondered if Dodge City had heard word yet of his latest location. He wondered if she worried.

He knew she did.

Evening: The Sky Above Paris

Toward evening, the sky burned orange over the distant city. The Eiffel Tower—just barely visible on a clear day—stood like a faint silhouette against the horizon. Soldiers never forgot they were defending one of the world’s great cities.

As darkness settled, the searchlight crews ran their checks. The low hum of generators filled the air, mingling with the chirp of insects and the muffled clatter of boots on gravel.

Leon finished stowing the horses and lingered near the gun pits. The great AA barrels pointed skyward like fingers ready to accuse any intruder overhead.

A private beside him whispered, “Hear that?”

A distant drone rolled across the night.

The men froze—not panicked, just attentive. It turned out to be an allied plane returning late to base, but the moment reminded them of why they were here, why Leon had spent months hauling supplies, tightening harnesses, and ensuring the guns never wanted for ammunition.

“Won’t miss that sound when this is over,” Leon murmured.

“No,” the private agreed. “But we’ll miss each other, I reckon.”

Leon nodded. “That, we will.”

Night: Thoughts of Home

Back in his tent, lanterns flickered low. Outside, someone coughed; another man softly hummed a tune from Kansas or Oklahoma or someplace equally far from France. Leon stretched out on his cot, boots tucked beside him. He traced with a finger the outline of his dog tags, then folded his arms behind his head.

> He thought of home—of Avenue G, the Methodist Sunday School, and the newspaper clipping that told the town he'd helped bring down a German plane. He thought of his brother **Marion**, still fighting somewhere on the front. He wondered if they'd end up on the same train home someday.
>
> Sleep came slowly but steadily, the way it often did after long days of labor. Tomorrow would bring more hauling, more guns, more vigilance. But each day, though wearying, brought them closer to the end of the war.
>
> In a few months he would board the **USS Ohio at Brest (20 Feb 1919)**. In a few more, he'd send a telegram from **Camp Stuart, Virginia**: *"Arrived here all OK am well and have written."* And on a bright morning in **April 1919**, he'd walk through Dodge City again with his honorable discharge in hand, the war behind him.
>
> But tonight, in 1918, Wagoner Leon Crawford slept under canvas in a quiet moment between battles, one of thousands who helped keep the skies above Paris safe.

The result amazed me—not only because it brought Leon's experiences to life, but because it showed how AI can help genealogists transform scattered records, newspaper clippings, and military notes into a cohesive, emotionally resonant story.

This technique doesn't replace research, but it *does* offer a powerful new way to interpret and share it.

This experiment showed me that AI can be a valuable storytelling tool—one that helps bridge the gap between research and family history. If you're looking for a fresh way to present your findings, I encourage you to try Diane Henriks' method. You may be surprised at how vividly your ancestors come alive when their daily worlds are fully imagined.

A Day in the Life Part 2

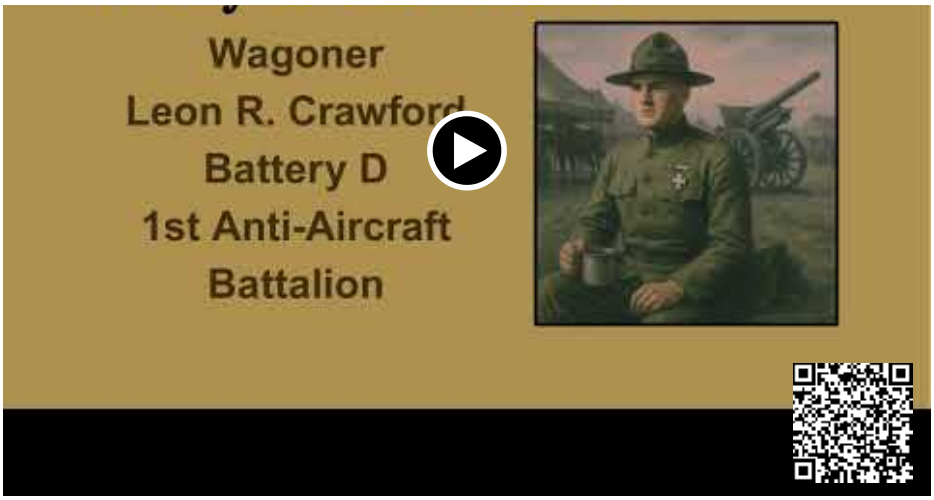
By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
November 26, 2025
Artificial Intelligence,Crawford
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/11/26/a-day-in-the-life-part-2/

Having recently used ChatGPT to create an immersive “day in the life” narrative about my grandfather, **Leon Crawford**, during World War I, I became curious about what else could be done with the story. Could I take that text-based narrative and turn it into a **narrated audio file**—and eventually a **video**?

Even though ChatGPT can write vivid stories, it doesn’t currently generate audio. However, it did recommend several tools that *do*. One of those tools was **Canva**, which includes an AI voice generator. ChatGPT even provided step-by-step instructions for turning my narrative into an audio track. I followed the directions, added an image that included a ChatGPT generated image behind the audio file, and within minutes I had created my first video version of his story.

Here is that video:

https://youtube.com/watch?v=XR_RvPN33CE

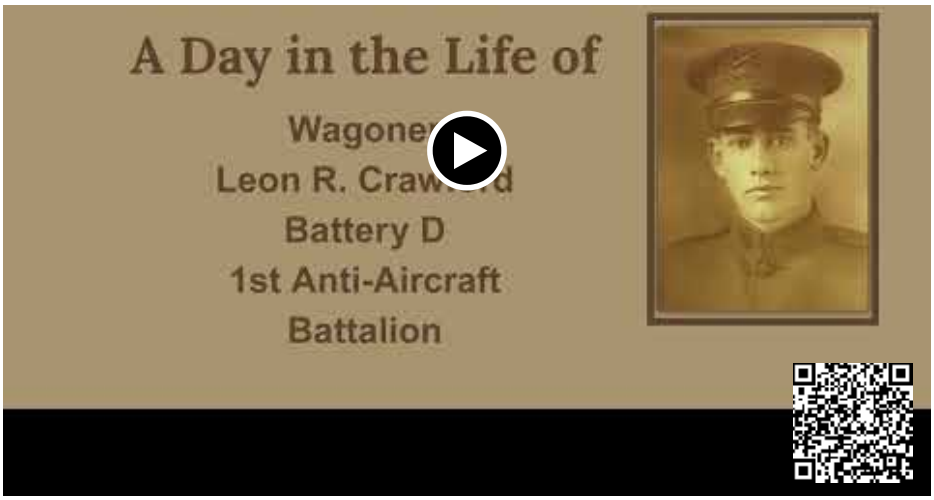


Although the Canva narration worked, I wasn't completely satisfied with the voice quality. Curious about other approaches, I asked ChatGPT whether it could turn the narrative into a **song** instead. Not only did it produce thoughtful lyrics based on Leon's military experiences, but it also generated a **Suno-ready prompt** so I could create a ballad-style AI performance of the song.

https://youtube.com/watch?v=sFFjnh3ZXRU

Next, I tried a different experiment. I copied the original "Day in the Life" narrative into **Google Notebook LM** and asked it to produce an audio overview. Even though the overview is based on an AI-generated story, the result provides an evocative sense of what a soldier might have experienced as part of an anti-aircraft artillery unit during World War I.

https://youtube.com/watch?v=csRI6ZBuoz8



Three different tools—Canva, Suno.com, and Google Notebook LM—each produced very different audio interpretations of the same narrative. Together, they offer a unique and multi-layered way to experience Leon Crawford's service during the Great War.

Turning Leon's narrative into audio and video gave me a fresh, unexpected connection to his life. Hearing his story aloud—whether as narration, song, or summary—made his experiences feel closer and more tangible. I'm grateful for the tools that allow us to preserve and share these memories in ways our ancestors could never have imagined.

Happy Thanksgiving

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
November 27, 2025
Thanksgiving
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/11/27/happy-thanksgiving-2/

Happy Thanksgiving greeting text with fall pumpkins, squash and leaves over dark wood table background

Today is a day for family. For me, it is also a day for community.

For the past several years, I have spent the early morning of Thanksgiving helping to prepare a Community Thanksgiving in my small town of Seneca, Kansas.

For over 25 years, the Seneca United Methodist church has prepared a free thanksgiving meal where I typically worth the early shift which prepares the dressing, puts the turkey on to reheat, starts the corn and then begins packaging the pies and salads. While it is a very early morning, it is a great way to serve the community!

Later in the day, my husband and I will hopefully travel to celebrate Thanksgiving with my brother and his family. Unfortunately, the forecasted weather may not be conducive to such travel.

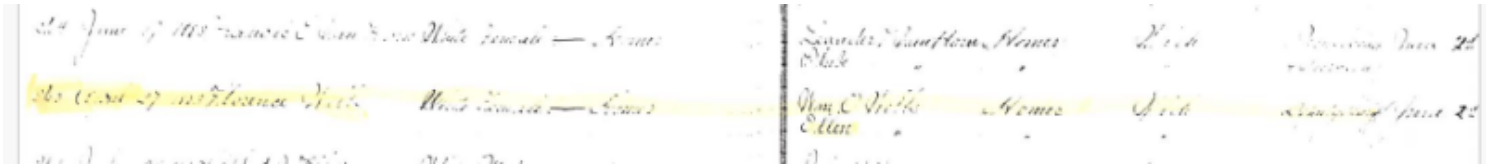
Some of my previous posts highlight our family thanksgivings.

- Thanksgiving (2023)
- Tradition (2022)
- 2006 Thanksgiving Soccer Game (2021)

Friday Finds

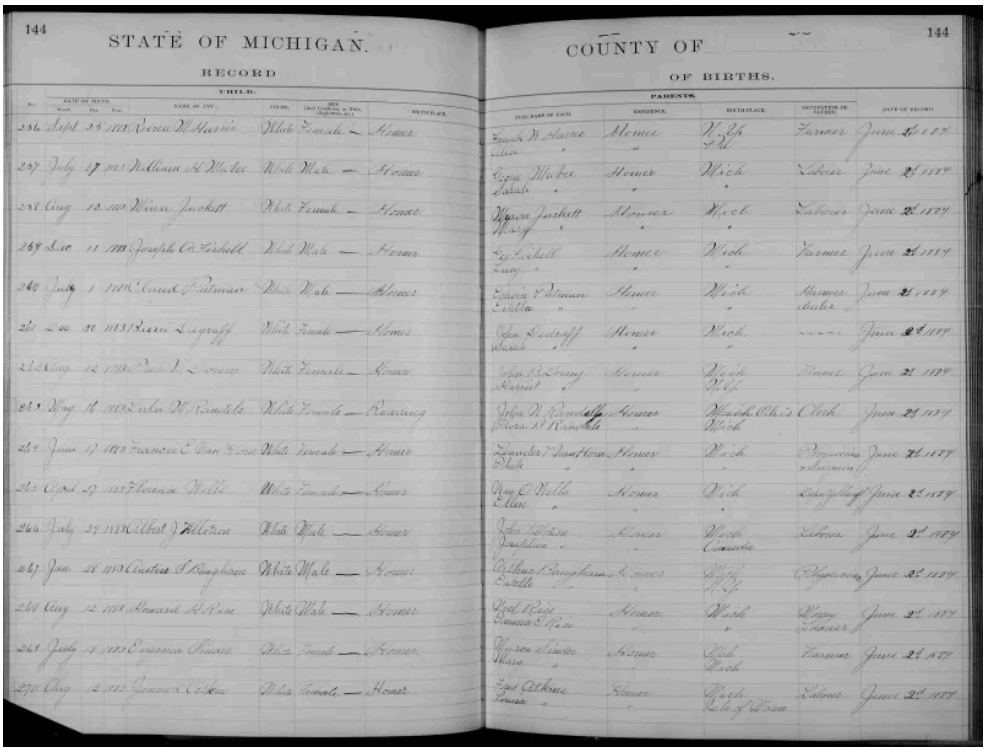
By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
November 28, 2025
Michigan,Wells
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/11/28/friday-finds-70/

Do you have old photocopies tucked away in your files—documents someone shared years ago—that you later discover are now available online? Today's *Friday Find* comes from my WELLS folder and is one of those rediscoveries. It's a birth record for Florence Wells, daughter of William O. Wells, born in Calhoun County, Michigan, in 1883.



FHL FILM # 1008278
STATE OF MI, Co., of Calhoun
Birth Record Vol III
Pg 144 #265

Although Florence's profile on the FamilySearch Family Tree already had several sources attached, none of them pointed to this specific record. Thankfully, the researcher who originally shared the photocopy with me had written the film number on the page. That little detail made all the difference. Using the film number, I was able to track down the exact same record on FamilySearch and view it directly online.


144

STATE OF MICHIGAN.

RECORD

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COUNTY OF

OF BIRTHS.

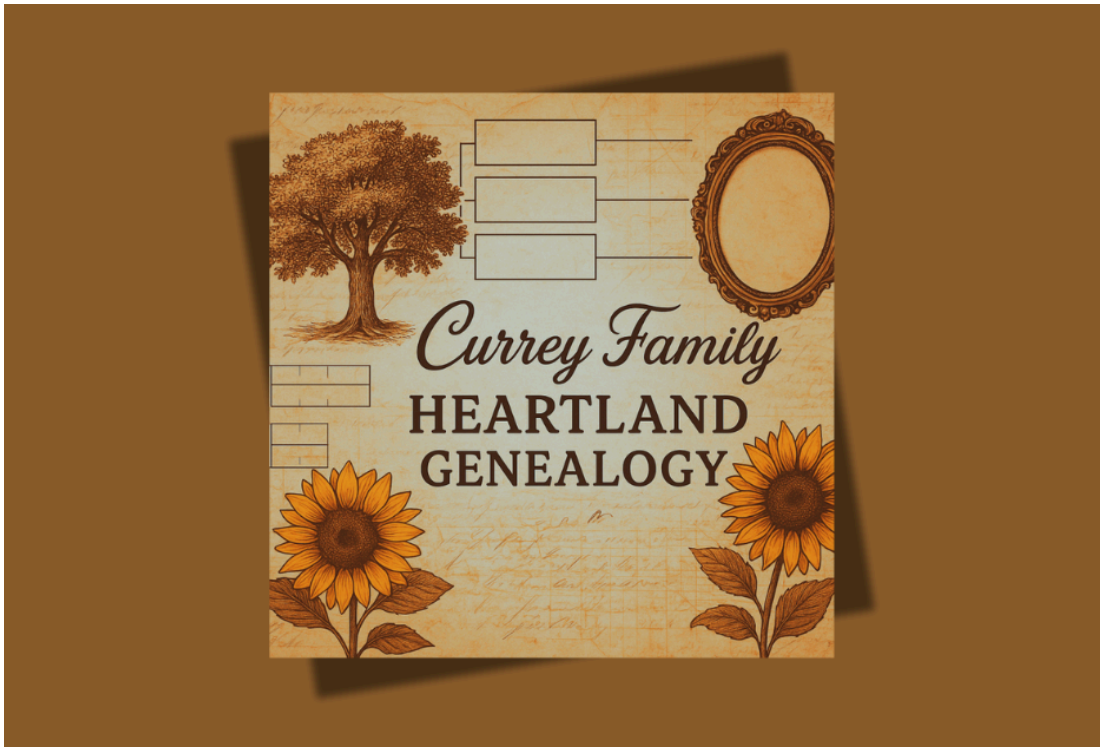
144

Michigan, Calhoun County. Birth records 1867-1921; birht index 1887-1923. Film #1008278. Florence Wells, 1883; Book 3: page 144; 199 of 676, digital images, FamilySearch familysearch.org : viewed online 21 November 2025.

Finding the original image allowed me to create a more complete and accurate citation—one that points to the actual record rather than just a photocopy. It's a great reminder to revisit those older documents in our files; with today's digitized collections, many of them are now easier than ever to verify and source properly.

A Video Tribute to My Grandmother

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
November 29, 2025
Artificial Intelligence,Currey
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/11/29/a-video-tribute-to-my-grandmother/



Winnie Letha (Currey) Crawford

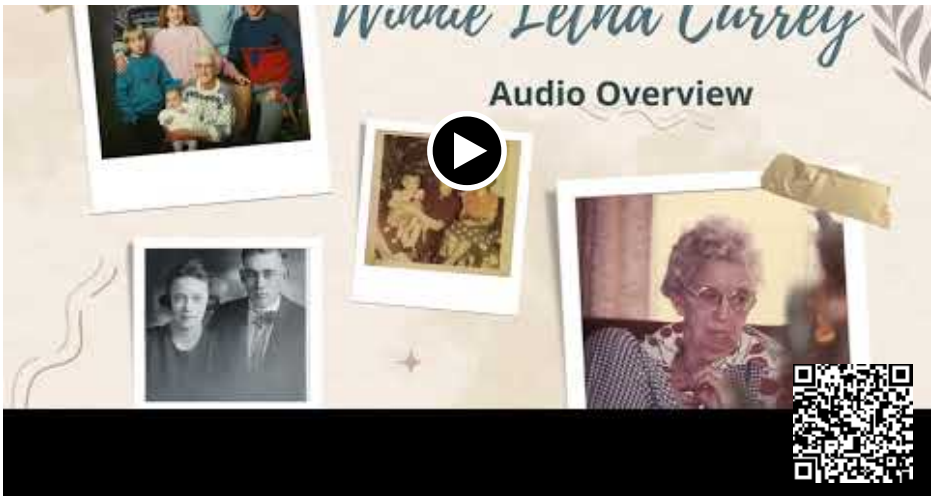
As I continue exploring creative ways to share family history, today's post features **two special multimedia tributes** to my grandmother, **Winnie Letha (Currey) Crawford**. Using her narrative biography, I created an audio overview in Google Notebook LM and transformed it into a video in Canva—bringing her story to life through voice, movement, and imagery.

Alongside that, I also turned the original song lyrics written about Winnie's life into a fully produced song using Suno.com. That recording, too, found its way into Canva and became its own musical video tribute.

Both videos—one spoken, one sung—capture different shades of Winnie's life: her strength, her challenges, her love for family, and her Kansas roots. Together, they offer a heartfelt multimedia portrait of a woman whose story continues to inspire the generations who follow her.

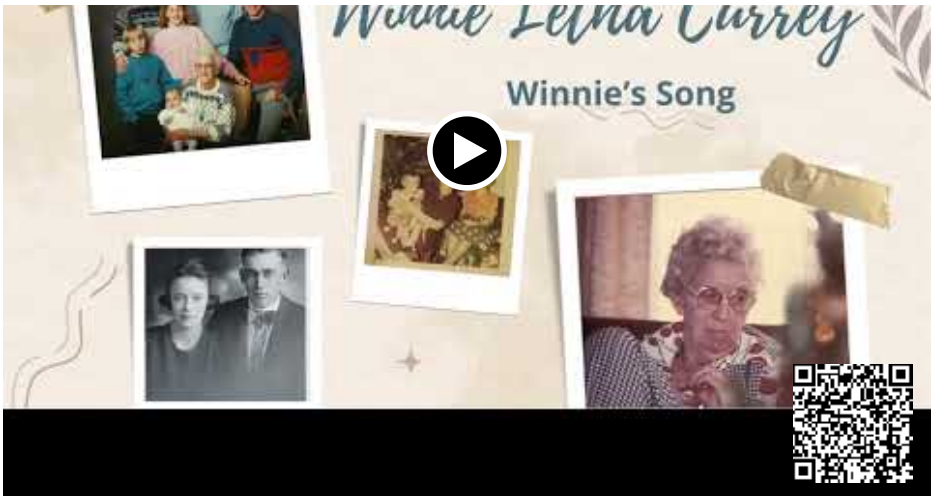
Winnie Letha (Currey) Crawford Audio Overview

https://youtube.com/watch?v=umqkEdKtZrg



Winnie's Song

https://youtube.com/watch?v=J0RMa0WOIGc



Bringing Winnie Currey Crawford's story into these new formats has reminded me how powerful it can be to blend genealogy with creativity. Whether through spoken narrative or through song, these videos offer fresh ways to honor a life that shaped so many of us. They preserve not just dates and records, but emotion, memory, and the spirit of the woman behind the name. I hope these two tributes help family members—present and future—feel a little closer to Winnie and carry her story forward in their own way.

Saturday Night Genealogy Fun

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
November 30, 2025
SaturdayNightGenealogyFun
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/11/30/saturday-night-genealogy-fun-178/

Calling All Genea-Musings Fans!

It's **Saturday Night again** —
and you know what that means…
time for some **Genealogy Fun!**

Hey boys and girls, gather 'round — it's Mission Impossible time (cue the music!). Your assignment, should you choose to accept it:

1. Larry Smith is credited with creating the idea of **six-word memoirs** (see https://www.sixwordmemoirs.com/).
2. Think about your own life. **How do you want to be remembered?** What matters most to you?
3. Then write at least one six-word memoir — on any subject, in any tone. The sky's the limit!

As for me? Creative writer I am **not**, so I turned to my faithful assistant for help. I shared a narrative report about myself from RootsMagic and asked for inspiration. My very creative assistant responded with the following six-word memoirs:

🌻 6-Word Memoirs Inspired by Your Life

Early Life & Education

- *Kansas girl growing, moving, learning constantly.*
- *Small-town childhood shaped a lifelong curiosity.*
- *From Glasco beginnings to lifelong learner.*

Teaching, Libraries, and Technology

- *Teacher, librarian, techie — always adapting.*
- *Science teacher turned librarian turned leader.*
- *Curiosity fueled classrooms, libraries, and labs.*
- *Teaching science; building connections; embracing change.*
- *Chalk dust, card catalog, computer cords.*

Faith & Community

- *Faith growing through churches and service.*
- *Serving community with heart and purpose.*
- *Church, community, history — threads of belonging.*

Historical Society & Preservation

- *Saving stories so others remember, too.*
- *Preserving Nemaha County: past meets purpose.*
- *Finding history, sharing history, making history.*

Genealogy & Family

- *Chasing ancestors, footnotes, and family truth.*
- *Roots deep, branches wide, stories unfolding.*
- *Past whispers; I listen and write.*
- *Genealogist forever untangling Crawford mysteries.*

Love & Marriage

- *Sorority candle, science class, lifelong love.*
- *Nickerson Farms proposal; lifetime partnership followed.*
- *Kansas kids, married young, growing together.*

Radio, Hobbies, & Curiosity

- *Teacher by day, radio call N0WYM.*

- *Always learning, always doing, always sharing.*
- *Curiosity calling — I always answered.*

Retirement & Reinvention

- *Retired teacher reinventing herself through history.*
- *Retirement opened doors to deeper purpose.*
- *Teaching ended; storytelling and preservation began.*

Your Life in A Single Line

- *Kansas heart. Lifelong learner. Story keeper.*
- *Teaching, learning, preserving — always moving forward.*
- *A life devoted to knowledge, community, connection.*

I had a lot of fun exploring these tiny snapshots of my life, and I have to give full credit to ChatGPT for helping me shape them. By feeding it the narrative report from RootsMagic, it pulled out themes, milestones, and memories I might not have thought to distill into just six words. It was an enjoyable collaboration — and a reminder that even in genealogy, a little creativity (and a little AI) can go a long way!

Monday Diggings

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
December 1, 2025
Briles,Randolph County, NC
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/12/01/monday-diggings-4/

Today's document comes from my **BRILES** folder, and it's one that genealogists dream of finding—an estate record that not only names living children but also accounts for grandchildren through deceased children. This particular record outlines how the estate of **John Briles of Randolph County, North Carolina** was distributed among his heirs following his death in **October 1857**.

The document reports a **net surplus of $4,06.42**, which was to be divided among John's **next of kin**, following North Carolina's laws of intestate succession. The record then details exactly how this division was to occur:

> **"The net surplus is to be divided among the intestate's next of kin as follows, to wit—1/14th to each of intestate's living children, to wit: Noah, Jacob, Dan, John, Alexander, Alfred, Rachel, Mary, Martha, Hellen & Nancy.
>
> And each of the eight children of Solomon Briles is entitled to 1/8th of 1/14th; and each of the six children of Elizabeth Laughlin, dec'd, is entitled to 1/6th of 1/14th; and each of the three children of Frederic Briles, dec'd, is entitled to 1/3rd of 1/14th of said surplus."**

This single paragraph gives us a near-complete list of John Briles's children—both living and deceased—along with the number of grandchildren in each deceased child's family. From this distribution, we learn:

Living Children (each receiving 1/14th):

Noah • Jacob • Dan • John • Alexander • Alfred • Rachel • Mary • Martha • Hellen • Nancy

(11 living children)

Deceased Children:

- **Solomon Briles** – left **8 children**
- **Elizabeth (Briles) Laughlin** – left **6 children**
- **Frederic Briles** – left **3 children**

This estate document not only confirms relationships but also helps reconstruct family groups for the mid-19th century Briles family—particularly valuable in a time and place where census records did not list household members by name before 1850.

Source:
North Carolina, Randolph County. *Record of Wills, 1773–1964.* Film #004779428. John Briles, dec'd, October 1857; Vol. 9: page 408; image 565 of 928. Digitized images, FamilySearch (www.familysearch.org), viewed online 22 November 2025.

AI Standards in Genealogy: Why Transparency Matters

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
December 2, 2025
Artificial Intelligence
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/12/02/ai-standards-in-genealogy-why-transparency-matters/

Do you use AI tools for genealogy? Have you experimented with Randy Seaver's ABC Biographies, asked Google Notebook LM to create an audio overview, tried Suno.com to generate a song, or asked ChatGPT to describe a day in the life of one of your ancestors?

I've used all of these—and I love how they expand what we can do as genealogists and storytellers. But the more I use them, the more I wonder: **Will future family members accept these AI-generated narratives as pure fact, without digging deeper into the sources behind them?** While I try to be open about my use of AI, I'm sure some posts slipped through without clear disclosure.

In early November, the **Coalition for Responsible AI Use in Genealogy** released a statement about ethically using AI to modify historical images. While their guidelines focus on images, the principles apply beautifully to written content as well. They recommend:

1. Always Label.

Provide a clear, human-readable label that an image has been modified or generated.

2. Always Cite.

At a minimum, cite the original source and note that the image was altered. More detailed, layered citations are even better.

3. Use as Illustration, Not Evidence.

Treat modified or generated images as illustrations only—not proof of identity, date, location, or event.

Although these rules were written for images, they prompted me to ask whether similar standards should apply to AI-generated stories and biographies. I've loved the polished, readable drafts that AI has created from my genealogy narrative reports. I've also been impressed by the "Day in the Life" story ChatGPT wrote about my grandfather's World War I service. But would someone reading these narratives understand which parts are documented fact and which parts are creative interpretation?

Andrew Redfern's post, **"A Continuum of AI Use in Family History,"** also helped me think through this issue. In his *INTERPRET* section, he emphasizes "transparent creativity"—the idea that we should be honest about when AI shaped our storytelling. If I want to honor that principle, then I need to be clear about AI's role in my ABC Biographies, audio overviews, and creative narrative pieces.

While researching "genealogy standards using AI," I found a surprisingly good AI-generated summary that reinforced the same themes:

Verify all AI-generated content

- **Treat suggestions as hypotheses:** AI can spark ideas, but genealogical conclusions must rest on verifiable sources.
- **Cross-reference everything:** Always check AI-generated facts against original records to avoid hallucinations.
- **Check AI-enhanced images:** Compare them with originals to ensure accuracy and avoid unintended distortions.

Practice ethical disclosure and transparency

- **Disclose AI usage:** Let readers know when AI meaningfully shaped a narrative, image, or interpretation.

My New AI Transparency Statement

Reflecting on these recommendations, I realized I needed a clearer, more consistent way to communicate how I use AI on this blog. To support transparency for current and future readers, I've now added an **AI-use statement to my About page**. It explains when and how I use AI tools—whether for editing, drafting, creative storytelling, or generating illustrative images—and affirms that **all genealogical conclusions are based on traditional research and verified sources.** Going forward, I will also add brief notes to individual posts when AI contributes creative content.

Reviewing all of these guidelines has made something very clear: **I need to be intentional about communicating my use of AI when telling my ancestors' stories.** AI is a powerful partner, but transparency ensures that family historians—now and in the future—can distinguish between documented evidence and creative expression.

Infographic

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
December 3, 2025
Artificial Intelligence,Crawford
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/12/03/infographic/

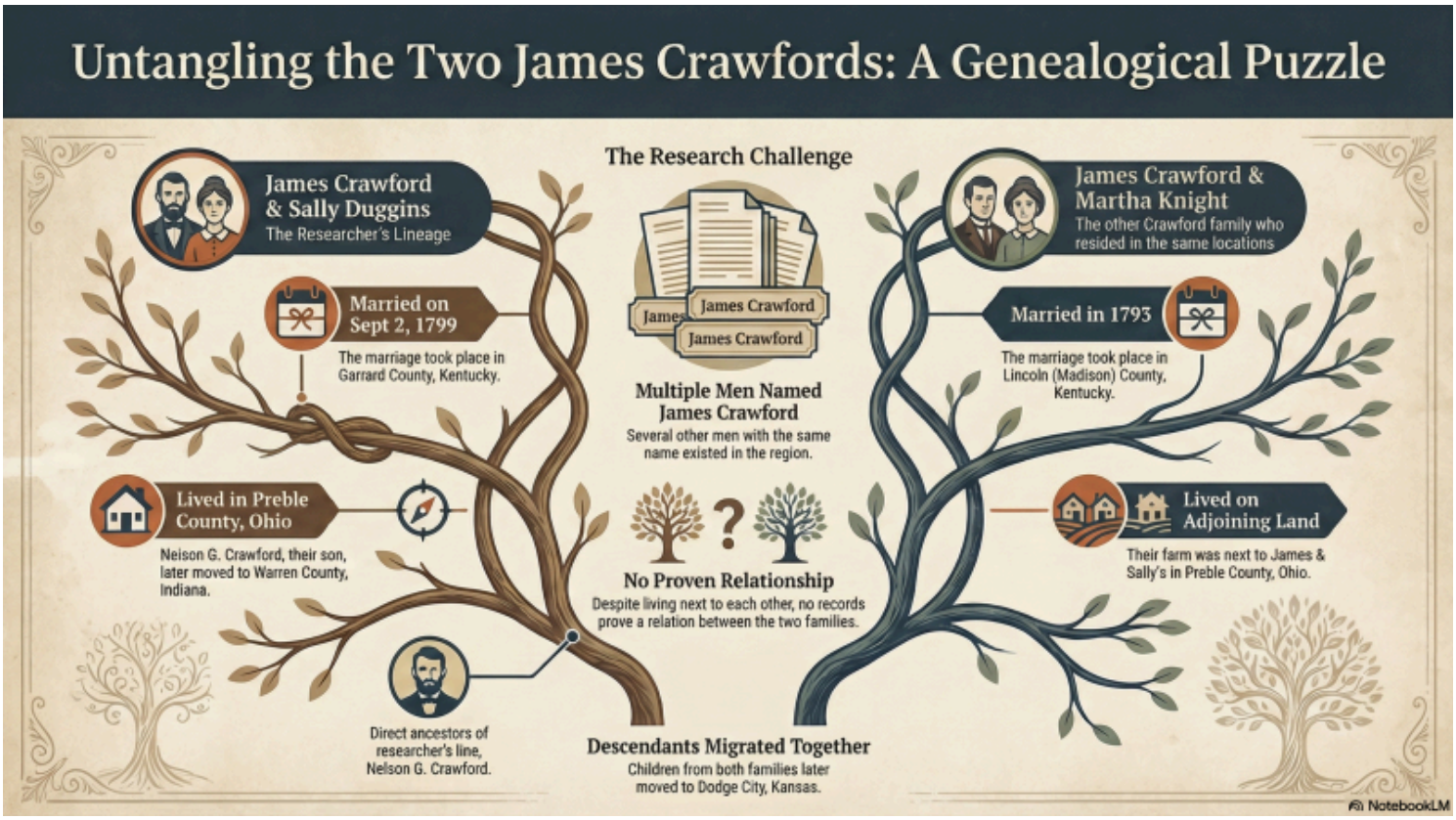
Are you a tech leader or a tech follower? Do you dive into new tools the moment they're released and immediately start telling others how to use them? Or do you watch what others are doing first and then experiment on your own terms?

When it comes to Artificial Intelligence, I've learned that I'm definitely in the *follower* category. I don't need to be the first to try everything—but once I see a tool that might help with my genealogical research, I'm more than willing to explore it.

Over the past few days, I noticed several posts about Google Notebook LM's new **infographic generator**. The idea of turning a narrative or research page into a visual summary was too tempting to pass up. So I gave it a try.

I fed Notebook LM my **Untangling James Crawford** research page and asked it to create an infographic.

Here's what it came up with:


Untangling the Two James Crawfords: A Genealogical Puzzle
James Crawford & Sally Duggins
The Researcher's Lineage
Married on Sept 2, 1799
The marriage took place in Garrard County, Kentucky.
Lived in Preble County, Ohio
Neison G. Crawford, their son, later moved to Warren County, Indiana.
Direct ancestors of researcher's line, Nelson G. Crawford.
The Research Challenge
James Crawford
James Crawford
Multiple Men Named James Crawford
Several other men with the same name existed in the region.
No Proven Relationship
Despite living next to each other, no records prove a relation between the two families.
Descendants Migrated Together
Children from both families later moved to Dodge City, Kansas.
James Crawford & Martha Knight
The other Crawford family who resided in the same locations
Married in 1793
The marriage took place in Lincoln (Madison) County, Kentucky.
Lived on Adjoining Land
Their farm was next to James & Sally's in Preble County, Ohio.
NotebookLM

Trying out the infographic feature turned out to be far more rewarding than I expected. Instead of simply reformatting my text, Notebook LM pulled out the core ideas, organized them visually, and created something that genuinely *enhanced* my understanding of the material. I'm impressed—maybe even a little delighted—by how effectively it distilled a complicated research puzzle into a clean, shareable graphic.

For someone who considers herself a tech follower, this was a good reminder that experimenting with new tools can open doors to fresh ways of seeing our work. In this case, the result was not only helpful, but downright fantastic. I'm looking forward to exploring how this feature might support other genealogy projects in the future.

Playing around with Google Notebook LM Slide Deck

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
December 4, 2025
Artificial Intelligence,Crawford
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/12/04/playing-around-with-google-notebook-lm-slide-deck/

Have you ever wondered whether someone else—especially an objective tool—would look at your brick-wall research and reach the same conclusions you have? Curious to see how an AI might sort through the many men named *James Crawford* in my Crawford FAN Club, I summarized the relevant families and asked Google Notebook LM to create a slide deck explaining my brick-wall question.

One of my most stubborn brick walls is my fourth great-grandfather, **James Crawford (219)**. James married **Sally Duggins (1441)** in Garrard County, Kentucky, in 1799. This was Sally's second marriage; she had two sons with her first husband, **Alexander Duggins (639)**: **Henry Duggins (481)** and **William A. Duggins (482)**. Sally's maiden name was **Sally Smith (1441)**.

Crawford Families in Garrard County, Kentucky Prior to 1800

Several Crawford families lived in the area before 1800, creating a challenging network of potential connections:

- **Mary Crawford (1413)** purchased land from Richard Cave and lived along Sugar Creek before her marriage to Alexander Moore.
- **James Crawford (1443)** owned land along Paint Lick Creek on the eastern edge of Garrard County. His wife, **Rebecca Anderson (1444)**, was the daughter of **John Anderson (10083)**. Rebecca's first husband was **John Maxwell (13444)**, with whom she had a son, **John Maxwell (13445)**.
- **John Crawford (6251)** is believed to have married **Rebekah Douglas (168)**. Rebekah purchased Garrard County land from **George Douglas (10320)** along the ridge dividing Boone Creek and Sugar Creek.
- **Moses Dooley**, an original Sugar Creek landowner and host of the "Old Sugar Meeting House," would have known many of these families. Both **Mary Crawford (1413)** and **Rebekah Crawford (168)** likely attended events at this meeting house.
- **William Crawford (10065)** owned Garrard County land before migrating to Pulaski County and eventually southeast Missouri.
- **Andrew Crawford (6251)** is believed to be a brother to William (10065), John (6251), and James (1443).

Crawford–Sellers Connections

- **James Crawford (1)** married **Martha Knight** in 1793 in Lincoln County, Kentucky. He is believed to be a son of **Rebekah (Douglas) Crawford (168)**.
- **Sarah Crawford (171)** married **William David Sellers (5228)**—son of **Nathaniel Sellers (1422)**—in 1796 in Lincoln County. **Rebekah Crawford (168)** gave permission.
- **Mary Crawford (170)** married **James Sellers (174)**, also a son of **Nathaniel Sellers (1422)**, in Lincoln County in 1791. Again, permission was granted by **Rebekah Crawford (168)**.

Migration to Ohio and Indiana

- **William Sellers (5228)** and **James Crawford (219)** jointly purchased land in Preble County, Ohio, as tenants in common in 1816.
- **James Crawford (219)** and **James Crawford (1)** owned adjoining land in Preble County. **James Crawford (1)** later migrated to Warren County, Indiana around the same time as **Nelson Crawford (199)**, son of **James Crawford (219)**. Descendants from both lines eventually settled in Dodge City, Kansas—and some are buried in the same cemetery section.

DNA Tangents

- **William Nelson Crawford (9886)** remains a brick wall for another researcher. DNA supports a relationship to descendants of **James Crawford (1)** and **Martha Knight**, though not to my specific line.

  Note: Numbers after names are the RootsMagic identifiers in my genealogy file.

About the Slide Deck

Google Notebook LM produced a beautifully organized slide deck—visually clear, logically structured, and surprisingly accurate given the complexity of this Crawford network. However, two slides needed correction:

Slide 4 – Misassigned Individual

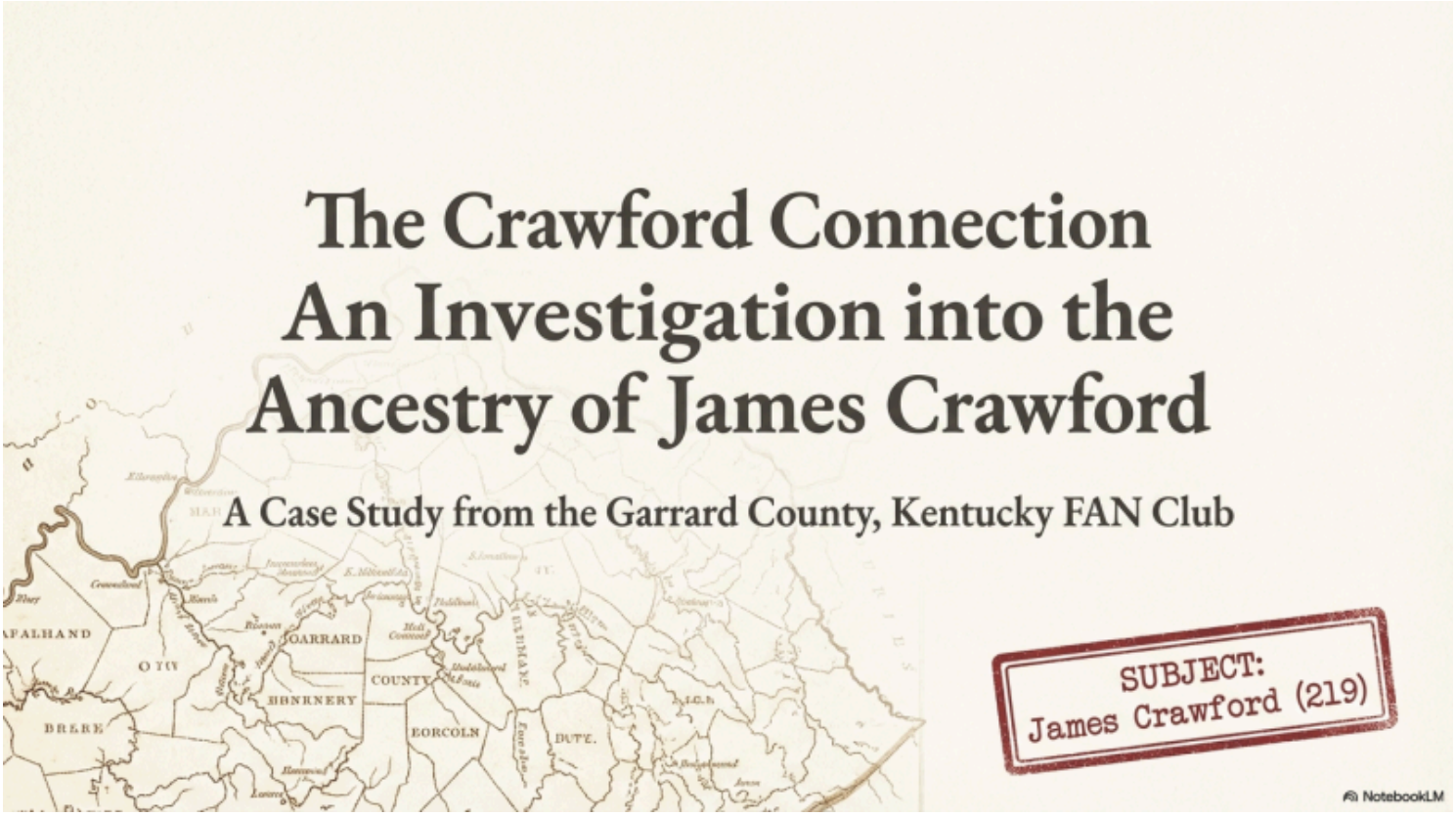
The deck listed a second “John Crawford” and incorrectly applied **William Crawford (10065)**’s number to him.

Slide 12 – The Hypothesis Problem

Google proposed that **James Crawford (219)** was a *son* of **Rebekah (Douglas) Crawford (168)** and therefore a brother to **James Crawford (1)**. This would require two surviving sons with the same name—highly improbable.

I modified the hypothesis: **James Crawford (219)** is better positioned as a *cousin* to **James Crawford (1)** and therefore a *nephew* of **Rebekah Crawford (168)**.

I also removed the DNA slide, as it focused on the DNA link between descendants of **William Nelson Crawford (9886)** and the family of **James Crawford (1)** / Martha Knight—not my direct line.


The Crawford Connection
An Investigation into the Ancestry of James Crawford
A Case Study from the Garrard County, Kentucky FAN Club
SUBJECT:
James Crawford (219)
NotebookLM

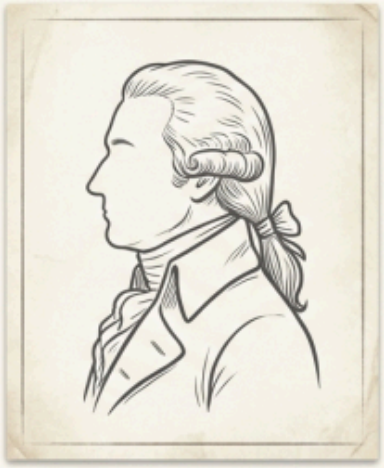
The Scene: A Community of Crawfords in Central Kentucky, c. 1790-1800

The challenge in this case is not a lack of Crawfords, but a **surplus**. In the late 18th century, Garrard and Lincoln Counties were a **nexus** for **several distinct** Crawford families living in close proximity.

Our investigation begins by identifying these groups to see where James (219) might fit.

NotebookLM

The Case File: Our Subject



James Crawford (219)

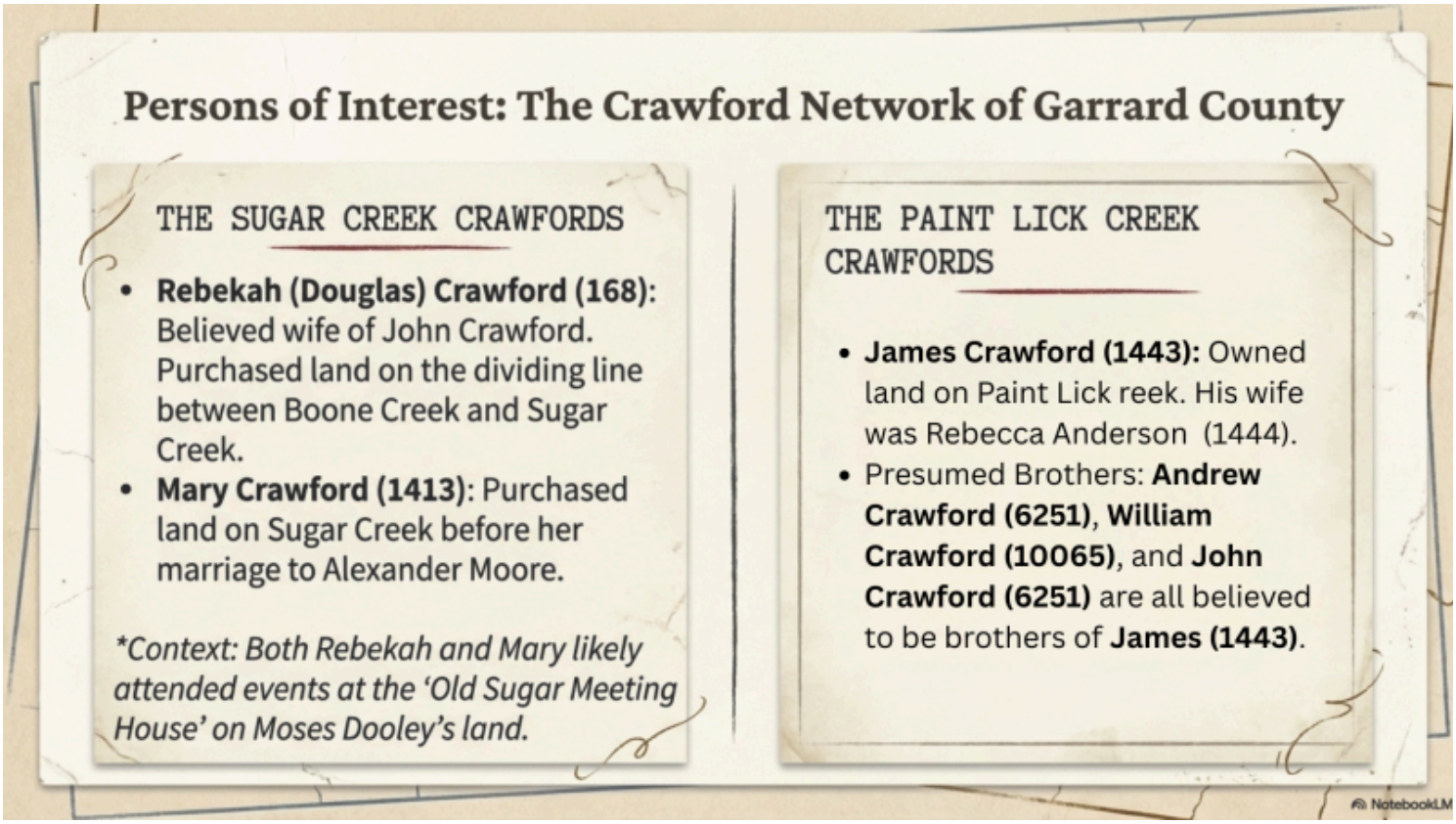
KNOWN INFORMATION

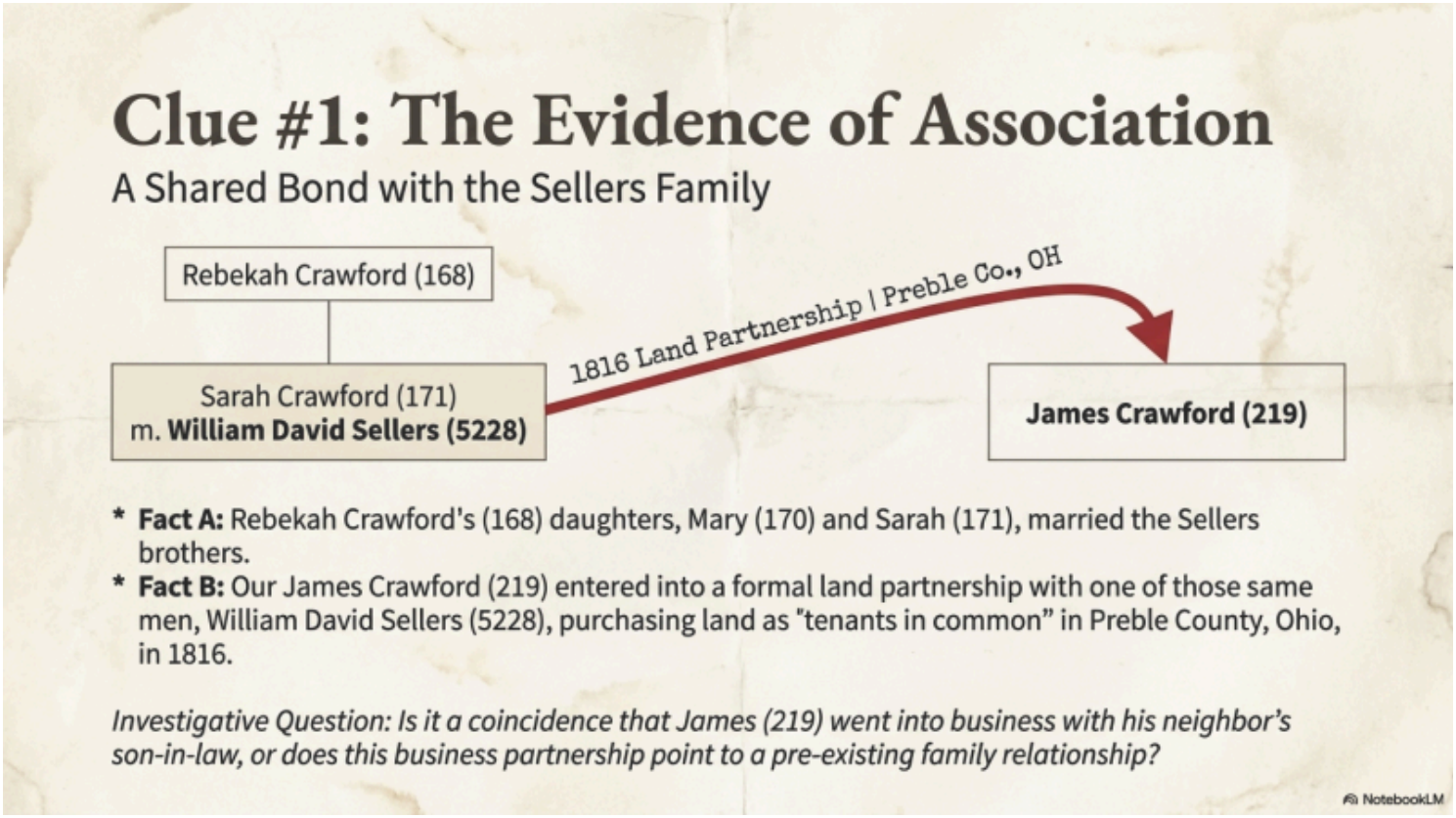
- Married Sally Duggins (1441), née Smith, a widow, in Garrard County, KY (1799).
- Sally's sons from her first marriage to Alexander Duggins (639) were Henry (481) and William A. Duggins (482).
- Purchased land as 'tenants in common' with William David Sellers (5228) in Preble County, OH (1816).
- Father of Nelson Crawford (199).

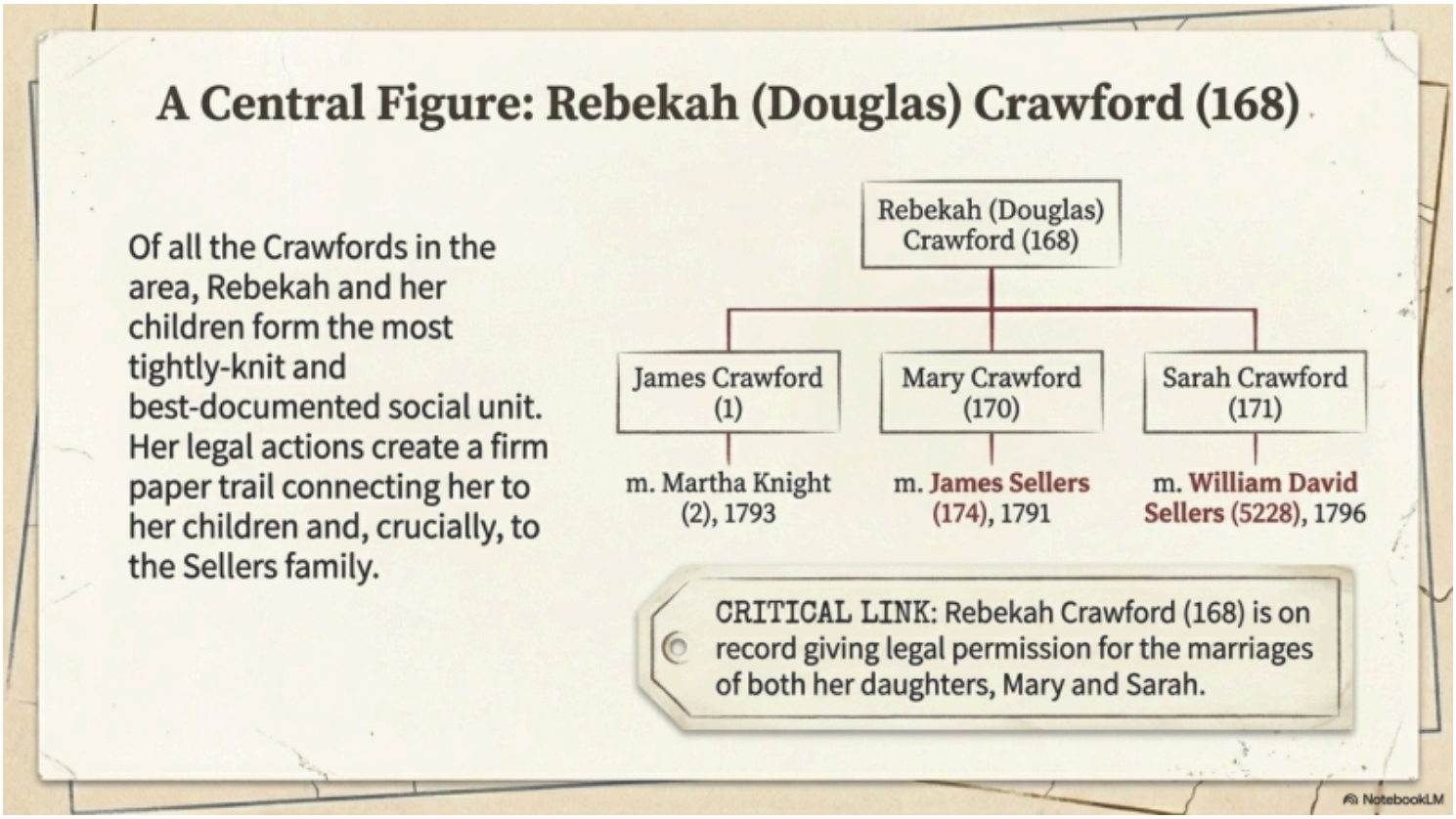
CENTRAL QUESTION

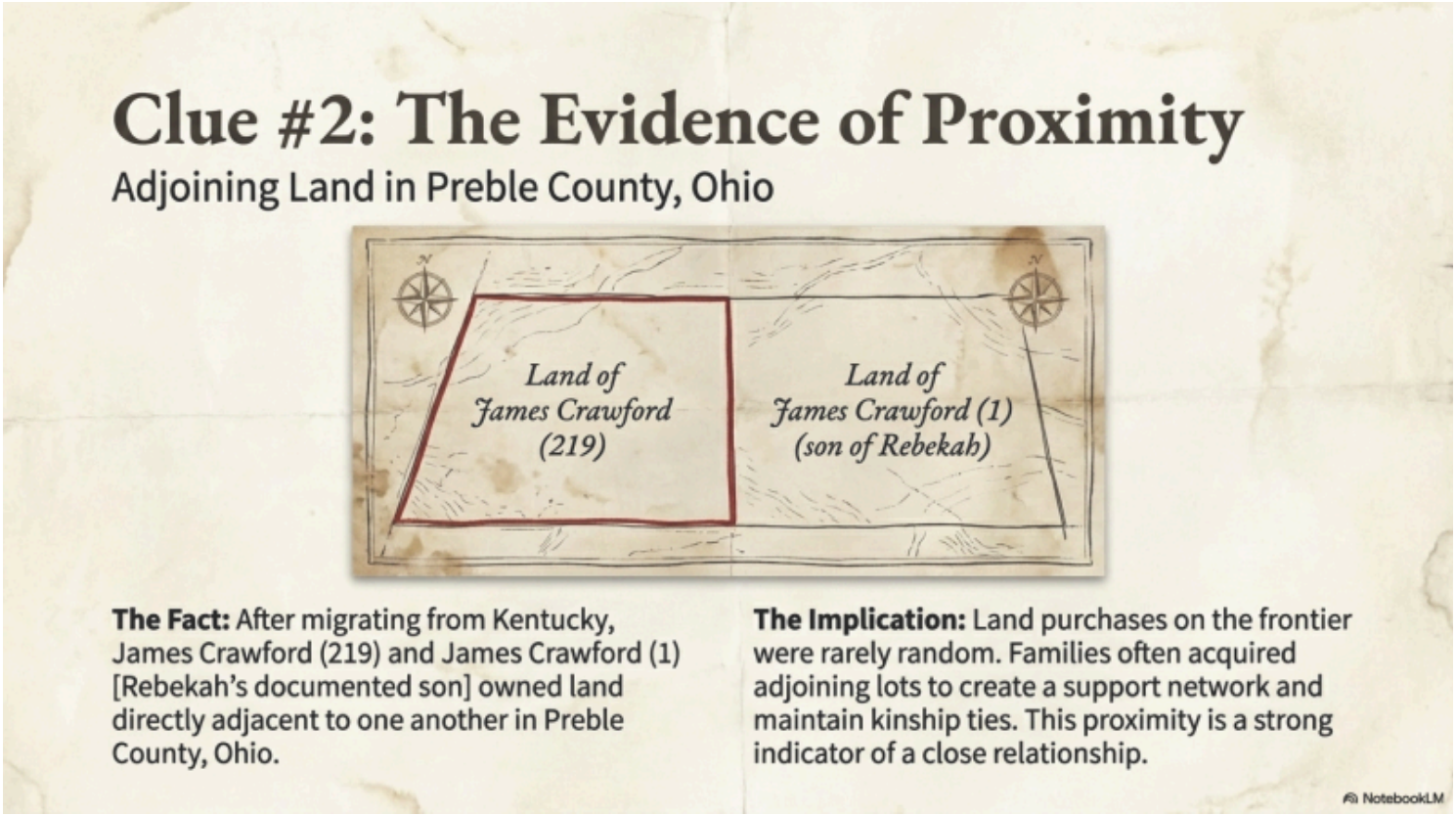
Who were his parents and siblings? What is his connection to the other Crawfords in the area?

NotebookLM


Persons of Interest: The Crawford Network of Garrard County
THE SUGAR CREEK CRAWFORDS
• Rebekah (Douglas) Crawford (168): Believed wife of John Crawford. Purchased land on the dividing line between Boone Creek and Sugar Creek.
• Mary Crawford (1413): Purchased land on Sugar Creek before her marriage to Alexander Moore.
*Context: Both Rebekah and Mary likely attended events at the 'Old Sugar Meeting House' on Moses Dooley's land.
THE PAINT LICK CREEK CRAWFORDS
• James Crawford (1443): Owned land on Paint Lick reek. His wife was Rebecca Anderson (1444).
• Presumed Brothers: Andrew Crawford (6251), William Crawford (10065), and John Crawford (6251) are all believed to be brothers of James (1443).
NotebookLM


Clue #1: The Evidence of Association
A Shared Bond with the Sellers Family
Rebekah Crawford (168)
Sarah Crawford (171)
m. William David Sellers (5228)
1816 Land Partnership | Preble Co., OH
James Crawford (219)
* Fact A: Rebekah Crawford's (168) daughters, Mary (170) and Sarah (171), married the Sellers brothers.
* Fact B: Our James Crawford (219) entered into a formal land partnership with one of those same men, William David Sellers (5228), purchasing land as "tenants in common" in Preble County, Ohio, in 1816.
Investigative Question: Is it a coincidence that James (219) went into business with his neighbor's son-in-law, or does this business partnership point to a pre-existing family relationship?
NotebookLM


A Central Figure: Rebekah (Douglas) Crawford (168)
Of all the Crawfords in the area, Rebekah and her children form the most tightly-knit and best-documented social unit. Her legal actions create a firm paper trail connecting her to her children and, crucially, to the Sellers family.
Rebekah (Douglas) Crawford (168)
James Crawford (1)
Mary Crawford (170)
Sarah Crawford (171)
m. Martha Knight (2), 1793
m. James Sellers (174), 1791
m. William David Sellers (5228), 1796
CRITICAL LINK: Rebekah Crawford (168) is on record giving legal permission for the marriages of both her daughters, Mary and Sarah.
NotebookLM


Clue #2: The Evidence of Proximity
Adjoining Land in Preble County, Ohio
Land of James Crawford (219)
Land of James Crawford (1) (son of Rebekah)
The Fact: After migrating from Kentucky, James Crawford (219) and James Crawford (1) [Rebekah's documented son] owned land directly adjacent to one another in Preble County, Ohio.
The Implication: Land purchases on the frontier were rarely random. Families often acquired adjoining lots to create a support network and maintain kinship ties. This proximity is a strong indicator of a close relationship.
NotebookLM

Clue #3: The Evidence of Kinship

A Shared Migration to Indiana

Preble County, OHIO → Warren County, INDIANA

- Nelson Crawford (199) (Son of our James 219)
- James Crawford (1) (Son of Rebekah 168)

The Fact:
The connection persisted into the next generation. Nelson Crawford (199), the son of our James (219), migrated from Ohio to Warren County, Indiana, at approximately the same time as James Crawford (1), son of Rebekah.

The Implication:
Synchronized, multi-generational migration is a classic pattern for close-knit family clusters moving to new territories.

NotebookLM

Clue #4: An Enduring Generational Bond

From Kentucky to Kansas

Descendants of James Crawford (219)

Descendants of James Crawford (1)

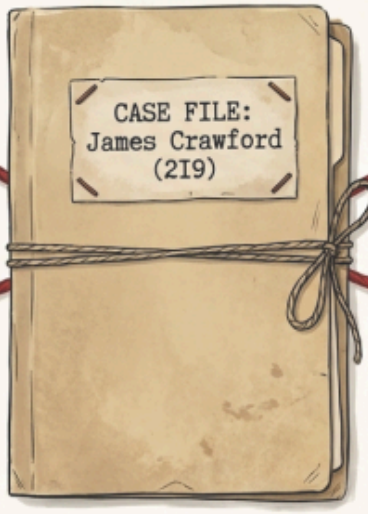
The Fact: The association between these two family lines did not end in Indiana. Decades later, descendants of *both* James Crawford (219) and James Crawford (1) were living in Dodge City, Kansas.

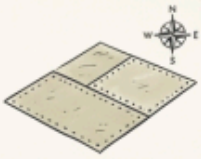
The Kicker: They are buried in the same section of the same cemetery, a testament to a connection that spanned nearly a century and crossed four states.

NotebookLM

Synthesizing the Evidence: Connecting the Dots

Sellers Partnership:
Business partner was the son-in-law of Rebekah (168).





Adjoining Ohio Land:
Owned adjacent property to Rebekah's son, James (1).

Joint Indiana Migration:
Son migrated with Rebekah's son, James (1).

Kansas Cemetery Link:
Descendants buried in the same cemetery section.

All threads of evidence consistently connect James Crawford (219) to the family network of Rebekah (Douglas) Crawford (168).

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The Investigation Continues: Avenues for Future Research

Primary Goal: The Paper Trail

Locate probate or land records for Rebekah Crawford (168) in Garrard or Lincoln County. A will or deed naming her heirs could provide direct proof.

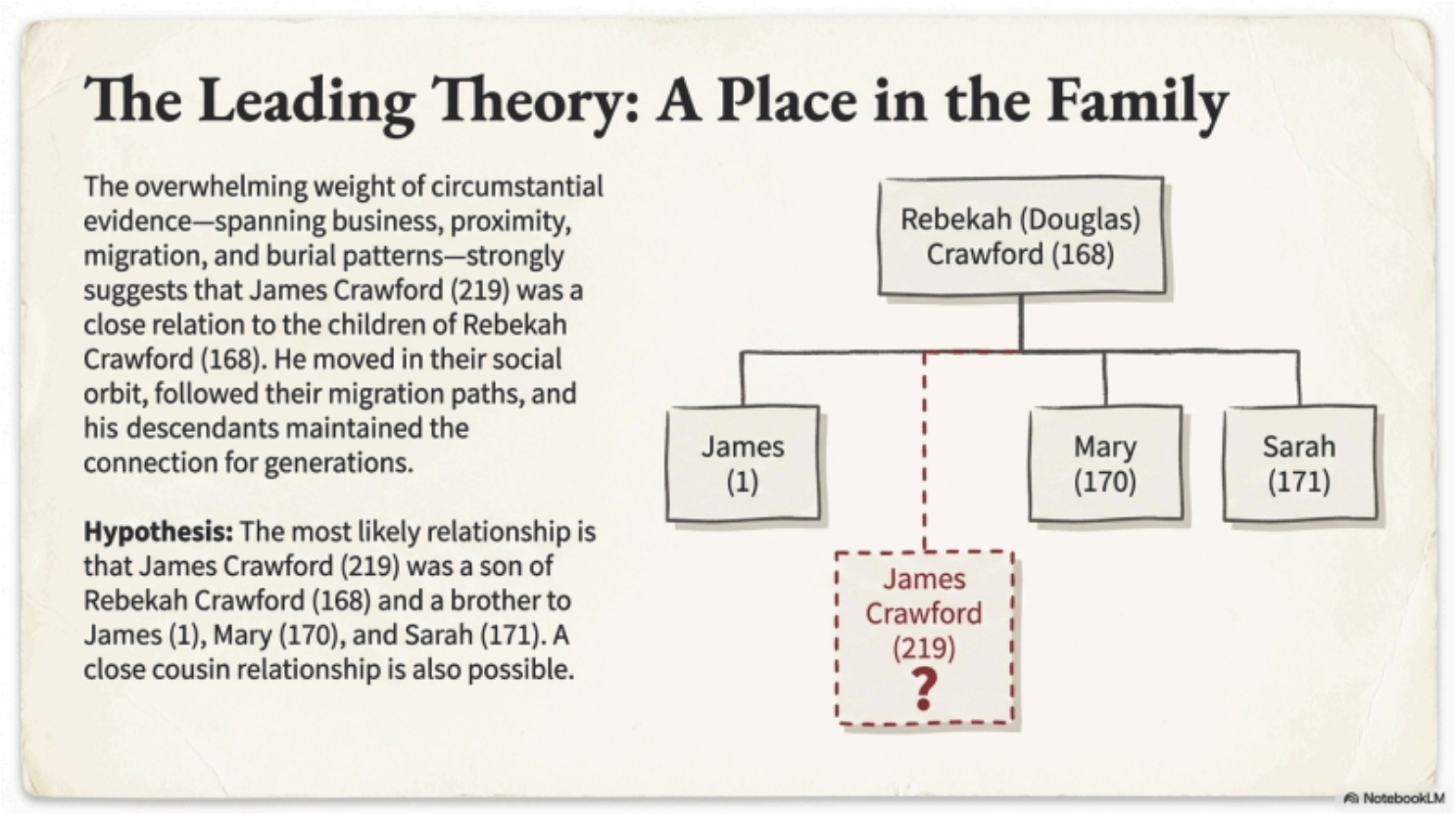
Secondary Goal: Church Records

Search for surviving records from the "Old Sugar Meeting House" which may list members of the various Crawford families.

Definitive Proof: Genetic Genealogy

Target Y-DNA testing of verified, direct-line male descendants of James Crawford (219) and James Crawford (1) to scientifically prove a shared paternal ancestor.

NotebookLM


The Leading Theory: A Place in the Family
The overwhelming weight of circumstantial evidence—spanning business, proximity, migration, and burial patterns—strongly suggests that James Crawford (219) was a close relation to the children of Rebekah Crawford (168). He moved in their social orbit, followed their migration paths, and his descendants maintained the connection for generations.
Hypothesis: The most likely relationship is that James Crawford (219) was a son of Rebekah Crawford (168) and a brother to James (1), Mary (170), and Sarah (171). A close cousin relationship is also possible.
Rebekah (Douglas) Crawford (168)
James (1)
Mary (170)
Sarah (171)
James Crawford (219)
?
NotebookLM

Acknowledgements & Discussion
This analysis is based on the research and compiled data presented in the 'Crawford Brick Wall FAN CLUB Notes2.pdf".
Thank you to all collaborating researchers who have contributed to this ongoing investigation.
Questions, corrections, and new evidence are welcome.
NotebookLM

Conclusion

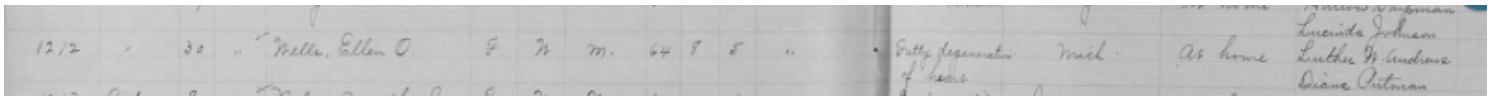
Exploring my Crawford brick wall through Google Notebook LM turned out to be a fascinating experiment. Even with a few inevitable hiccups, the slide deck offered a fresh way to visualize long-studied relationships and reinforced how complex—and interconnected—these early Garrard County families truly were. While I still have unanswered questions about **James Crawford (219)**, seeing my data reframed in a new format helped clarify patterns, highlight assumptions, and even spark a few new research angles. AI may not solve a brick wall, but it certainly provides another lens—and sometimes that new perspective is exactly what we need to keep moving forward.

Friday Find

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
December 5, 2025
Michigan,Wells
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/12/05/friday-find-102/

Today's find from my **WELLS** folder features two documents that help illuminate the final chapter of **Ellen Andrews Wells**: her official death record from **Calhoun County, Michigan**, and her obituary published in the *Albion Evening Recorder*. Although I originally had photocopies in my files, I'm delighted that both of these items are now accessible online.

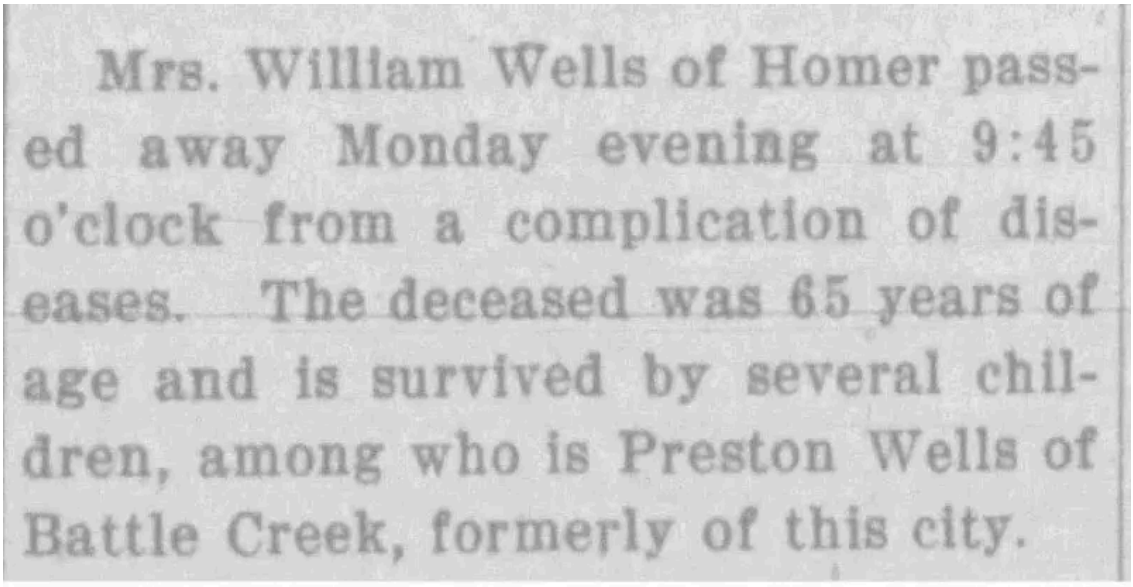
🔎 Death Record



Michigan, Calhoun County. Death Records, 1867-1933; Death Index, 1888-1996. Film #1009293. Ellen Wells, 30 Jan 1911; vol. 4: page 21; 241 of 778, digital images, FamilySearch http://www.familysearch.org : viewed online 29 November 2025.

The Calhoun County death record for Ellen Wells is now digitized and available on **FamilySearch**. I was able to attach the record directly to her profile on the FamilySearch tree so that other researchers—and future descendants—can easily view the original source. Having online access to the actual record also allowed me to verify details, check spellings, and capture a more complete and accurate citation.

🗞️ Obituary in the *Albion Evening Recorder*



Mrs. William Wells of Homer passed away Monday evening at 9:45 o'clock from a complication of diseases. The deceased was 65 years of age and is survived by several children, among who is Preston Wells of Battle Creek, formerly of this city.

NewspaperArchive by Storied

"Local," The Albion Evening Recorder (Albion, Michigan), 1 February 1911, page 3; digital images, Newspaper Archive (newspaperarchive.com : viewed online 29 November 2025).

I located Ellen's obituary on **NewspaperArchive**, where the scan is much clearer than the copy in my files. The obituary provides key details about her family, her community connections, and the circumstances of her death—details often missing from official recordings.

Here is a transcription for easier reading and searching:

Transcription of Obituary:
Mrs. William Wells of Homer passed away Monday evening at 9:45 o'clock from a complication of diseases. The deceased was 65 years of age and is survived by several children, among who is Preston Wells of Battle Creek, formerly of this city.

🧭 Why These Finds Matter

Together, these two documents enrich the story of Ellen Wells by combining the facts of the death record with the personal narrative preserved in the newspaper. Whenever I can pair a civil record with a contemporary obituary, it fills in small but meaningful pieces of a life that might otherwise be lost.

If you have old photocopies tucked away in your folders, you might discover—like I did today—that the originals are now available online and easier than ever to cite and share.

ABC Biography Edward Osmund Briles

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
December 6, 2025
ABC Biography,Briles
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/12/06/abc-biography-edward-osmund-briles/

For this week's ABC Biography, I'm turning my attention to one of the most dynamic—and at times surprising—lives in my Briles family tree: **Edward Osmund Briles**. Born in 1891 on the Kansas prairie, Edward's life unfolded across eras of dramatic change, from horse-powered threshing machines to the rise of automobile garages and small-town movie theaters. His story is woven through Coffey, Woodson, Allen, and Lyon counties, touching nearly every corner of the communities my family called home.

What begins as the life of a Kansas farm boy soon becomes the story of an entrepreneur, mechanic, showman, and devoted family man—someone whose adaptability and energy mirrored the transformations of the early 20th century. Using the rich collection of documents, clippings, and family papers preserved over the years, today's post explores Edward's life, one chapter at a time.

A Narrative Life of Edward Osmund Briles (1891–1956)

Edward **Osmund** Briles was born on **21 June 1891** in Burlington, Coffey County, Kansas—a child of the prairie at a time when rural Kansas was dotted with one-room schools, wheat fields, and the steady rhythm of farm life. Known interchangeably as *Edward*, *Osmond*, and occasionally *Oscar* in early records, he grew up surrounded by extended Briles and Mentzer kin whose lives were intertwined between Coffey and Woodson Counties.

Early Years on the Kansas Prairie

Edward spent his childhood in **Neosho Township** before the family moved to **Pleasant Township**, Coffey County, where he attended **Rock Creek School**. Small school souvenir booklets preserved by his descendants give a glimpse of his early education—names of teachers, classmates, and the sort of rural schooling that shaped Kansas farm children at the turn of the century.

He frequently visited his grandparents in **Woodson County**, a place that would become central to his adult life. By 1908, he was enrolled at **Phelps Public School** in Liberty Township, suggesting another family move or shift in responsibilities, typical of families juggling farming, seasonal work, and educational opportunities.

A Young Man at Work

By the **1910 census**, Edward—age 18—was living with his parents in Woodson County and beginning his adult working life. He first gained notice in local papers for his work with **threshing machines**, heavy and vital equipment in the wheat-growing regions of

Kansas. Threshing crews worked long hours in summer heat, moving from farm to farm, and Edward eventually became known for operating and managing his own crew.

On **29 October 1915**, Edward married **Pauline Edith Mentzer** in Yates Center, uniting two families that had long shared community, geography, and friendship. He was baptized the following year, and by 1917 he had registered for the World War I draft under the name **Osmond Edward Briles**.

Threshing, Farming, and New Opportunities

Through the late 1910s Edward continued to run threshing crews in both Coffey and Woodson Counties—large operations that often made the local papers. But the 1920s brought a significant shift: **automobiles** were transforming American life, and Edward stepped into the new mechanical age.

Entrepreneurship and the Briles Garage

By **1922**, Edward had opened **Briles Auto Repair and Garage** in Iola, Kansas. Within a year he purchased a large brick building on North Jefferson Street, expanding from small-scale repairs to a full dealership and service garage. Newspapers advertised the **Chandler cars** he sold, the **Cleveland Six**, and the dependable service offered by “Briles Garage.”

He participated in the **Iola Chamber of Commerce Good Fellowship Tour** in 1923, driving the service car—a role that suggests both his mechanical skill and his reputation for reliability.

However, by late 1924 he sold the garage, possibly seizing an opportunity or responding to the changing business environment. He returned briefly to threshing work, but his path soon turned again.

From Machinery to Movies: A New Career

In the late 1920s Edward entered a surprising new field: **motion picture exhibition**.

By **1930**, he had acquired picture-show equipment and moved to **Buffalo, Wilson County**, where he operated the **Lyric Theatre**. The 1930 census lists him as a *picture show machine operator*, marking the beginning of a two-decade career as a theater owner, operator, and manager.

His daughter **Roberta Adell Briles** was born in Buffalo the same year, one of several milestones marking this period of transition.

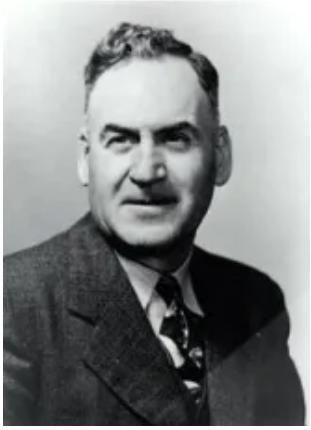
Throughout the 1930s Edward became deeply embedded in the Kansas movie-house circuit. After moving to **Emporia**, he leased and later owned the **Lyric Theater** there, as well as theaters in **Cottonwood Falls** and **Excelsior Springs, Missouri**. His work included installing new sound systems, managing promotions, and weathering the competitive and sometimes contentious landscape of film distribution.

The Sunday Show Controversy

Edward's name appeared prominently in 1933–1934 newspapers when he was twice arrested for running Sunday shows, which violated local ordinances in Emporia. He appealed the charges, but ultimately was found guilty. These articles paint a picture of a man willing to challenge restrictive norms in order to keep his business thriving during the tough years of the Great Depression.

Life in Emporia and Continued Theater Work

By the 1940s, the Briles family was firmly rooted in Emporia. Edward managed the Lyric and later the **Strand Theater**, installed a modern popcorn machine, and continued adapting his business through wartime and post-war changes in the entertainment industry.



He registered again for the draft during **World War II**, experienced a minor car accident, and remained active in civic and professional activities—including the **Movietime USA** promotion campaign of 1951.

Family Life

Edward and Pauline raised five children:

- **Walter Emery Briles** (1917–1982)
- **Kenneth Eugene Briles** (1918–1919), who died in infancy
- **Letha Marie Briles** (1924–2012)
- **Roberta Adell Briles** (1930–2022)
- **Barbara Ann Briles** (1934–1982)

Their lives carried forward the Briles and Mentzer lineages through Kansas, Missouri, Mississippi, California, and beyond.

Final Years and Legacy

Edward died on **28 May 1956** in Emporia at the age of 64 and was buried at **Maplewood Memorial Lawn Cemetery**. Pauline would live nearly three more decades, preserving many of the photos, documents, and memories that allow his story to be reconstructed in such detail.

Edward Osmund Briles lived a life emblematic of 20th-century Kansas—rooted in farming but shaped by modernity. He moved from threshing crews to automobile repair to the motion-picture business, adapting with each new era. His work ethic, entrepreneurship, and willingness to embrace new technology left a legacy not only in his family but in the communities where he lived and worked.

Conclusion

Edward Osmund Briles lived a life shaped by change, curiosity, and an unmistakable drive to keep moving forward. From the wheat fields of Coffey and Woodson Counties to the bustling garages and movie houses of Iola and Emporia, he embraced each new opportunity with the same steady determination he learned as a Kansas farm boy. His story reflects not only the evolution of one man's work and family, but also the transformation of small-town Kansas across the first half of the 20th century. Through the documents, photographs, and clippings preserved by his children and grandchildren, Edward's legacy endures—not just as a businessman or theater operator, but as a man who continually adapted, reinvented himself, and left a trail of community connections wherever he lived. This narrative ensures that his contributions, large and small, remain part of the family history he helped to shape.

Saturday Night Genealogy Fun

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
December 7, 2025
SaturdayNightGenealogyFun
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/12/07/saturday-night-genealogy-fun-179/

Calling all Genea-Musings Fans:

It's Saturday Night again –

Time for some more Genealogy Fun!!

Join in and accept the mission and execute it with precision. Here's your chance to sit on Genea-Santa's lap (virtually) and tell him about your Christmases past.

Rev up the olde thynking cap and cue up the Mission Impossible music – your mission should you decide to accept it – keeping with the Christmas theme – is:1) Today's challenge is to share memories of December holiday gatherings and celebrations with your families (as a child, a young adult, a parent, a grandparent, a great-grandparent, an aunt or uncle, a nibling, a cousin, an in-law)!

2) Pick two or three questions from the list in my blog post: Ask AI Gemini: "What questions can I write about concerning family gatherings and celebrations during the December holidays?" This is a new list of questions somewhat different from last year's list.

3) Tell us about your memories of your holiday gatherings and celebrations in your own blog post, in a comment here, or on your Facebook page. Be sure to leave a link to your report in a comment on this post.

Do you have a family heirloom that only comes out during the December holidays? Can you trace its provenance?

When my parents downsized, one of the items that I received was the nativity set. I'm not sure of the provenance of this nativity set, but my memory says that it was in my grandparents house prior to my parents.

- **What is the funniest or most dramatic mishap that ever occurred during a December holiday celebration?**

One Christmas morning, everyone woke up to the smell of a fully cooked turkey. Upon investigation,it was discovered that the oven had been left on 'broil' from the night before. Thus, when the turkey started cooking, it was broiling instead of baking.

Photos document some of our other 'funny' instances. One year, we decided to create an image of a Christmas tree decorated with the backs of our heads.

Another year, my niece made chef's hats and aprons for several family members. This 'gift' was also documented with a photo.

Where was the most memorable holiday gathering location (a specific house, town, or country)? Why did that location hold special significance?

Growing up, Christmas meant presents under the tree of my parents before going to my grandparents for Christmas dinner. After the death of my grandparents, we gathered in Texas several times. The first time, we flew to San Antonio for a few days after Christmas. Since my parents were full-time RVers, this gave us a chance to visit their 'winter' home in Hondo, Texas.

After my father's death, we spent flew to Austin, Texas to spend a few days 'camping'.

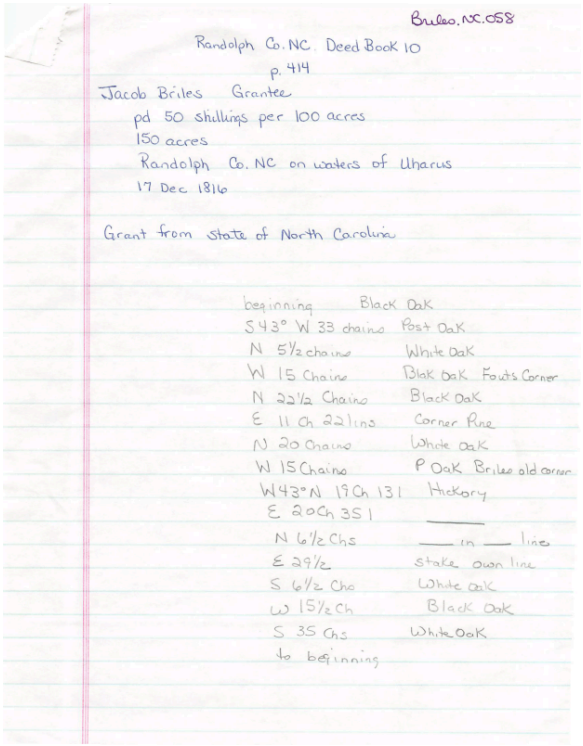
OLYMPUS DIGITAL CAMERA

While we continue to gather as a family around a campfire, our ‘cabin camping’ has moved to October and takes place at Acorns Resort in Kansas.

Monday's Diggings

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
December 8, 2025
Briles,Randolph County, NC
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/12/08/mondays-diggings-19/

Buried deep in my BRILES folder was a fascinating find—an 1816 deed for land owned by a man named **Jacob Briles** in Randolph County, North Carolina. As anyone who has researched this family knows, *Jacob* is a remarkably common given name among the Briles clan. That means identifying exactly which Jacob owned this tract requires more than a quick glance; it calls for careful land research, map work, and a closer look at the surrounding community.
In today's Monday's Diggings, I'm sharing my original notes, a hand-drawn plat of the property, a transcription of the deed, and the image of the record itself. Each piece helps bring this little corner of Randolph County—and the Briles family who lived there—into sharper focus.



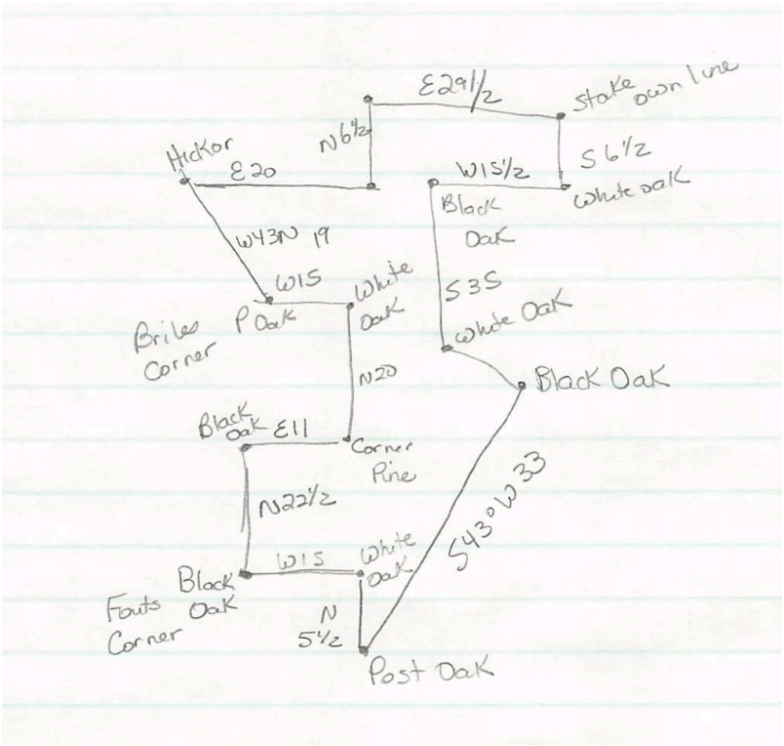
Briles, NC.058

Randolph Co. NC Deed Book 10
p. 414

Jacob Briles Grantee
pd 50 shillings per 100 acres
150 acres
Randolph Co. NC on waters of Uharus
17 Dec 1816

Grant from State of North Carolina

beginning	Black Oak
S 43° W 33 chains	Post Oak
N 5½ chains	White Oak
W 15 Chains	Blak Oak Fouts Corner
N 22½ Chains	Black Oak
E 11 Ch 22 lins	Corner Pine
N 20 Chains	White oak
W 15 Chains	P Oak Briles old corner
W 43° N 19 Ch 13 l	Hickory
E 20 Ch 35 l	———
N 6½ Chs	——— in ——— line
E 29½	stake own line
S 6½ Chs	White oak
W 15½ Ch	Black Oak
S 35 Chs	White Oak
to beginning	



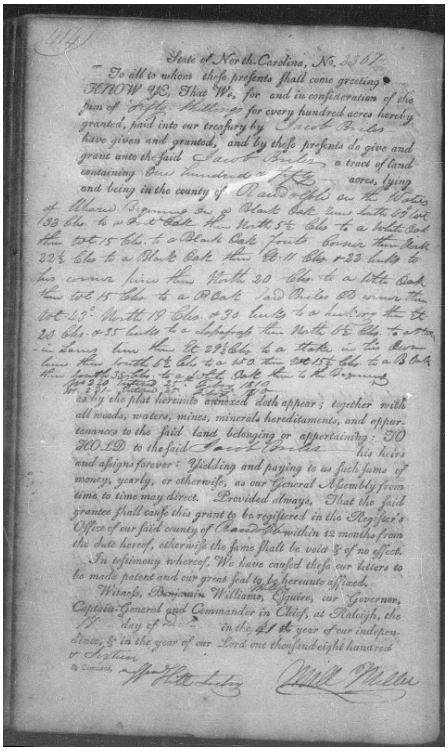
Randolph County, North Carolina
Deed book 10
page 414

“Randolph, North Carolina, United States records,” images, FamilySearch (https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3QS7-L98Q-3S1Z?view=explore : Nov 29, 2025), image 485 of 514; . Image Group Number: 007517636

Image 485 of 514

State of North Carolina , No .2367
To all to whom these presents shall come greeting
Know Ye , That We , for and in consideration of the
sum of Fifty shillings for every hundred acres hereby
granted , paid into our treasury by Jacob Briles

have given and granted , and by these presents do give and
grant unto the said Jacob Briles a tract of land
containing One hundred & fifty acres , lying
and being in fifty the County of Randolph on the waters
of Uharee Beginning on a Black Oak runs South 43 degrees [Wt]
33 Chs to a post oak then North 5 1/2 Chs to a White Oak
then Wt 15 chs to a Black Oak Fouts Corner then north
22 1/2 Chs to a Black Oak then Et 11 chs & 22 links to
corner pine then North 20 chs to a white Oak
then Wt 15 Chs to a P Oak said Briles [old] corner then
Wt 43 degrees North 19 Chs & 30 links to a hickory then Et
20 Chs & 35 links to a Sassefross then North 6 1/2 shs to a stake
in Lans line then Et 29 1/2 Chs to a stake in his own
line then South 6 1/2 Chs to a W. O . then Wt 15 1/2 Chs . to a B Oak
then South 35 Chs . to a White Oak . then to the Begining
No 220 Entered 25h Febry 1810
No. 221 Entered 25 Febry 1810
as by the plat hereunto annexed doth appear ; together with
all woods , waters , mines , minerals hereditaments , and appur
tenances to the said land belonging or appertaining . To
Hold to the said Jacob Briles his heirs
and assigns forever . Yielding and paying – to us such sums of
money , yearly , or otherwise , as our General Assembly from
time to time may direct . Provided always , That the said
grantee shall cause this grant to be registered in the Register
Office of our said County of Randolph within 12 months from
the date hereof , otherwise the same shall be void & of no effect .
In testimony whereof , We have caused these our letters to
be made patent and our great seal to be hereunto affixed .
Witness , Benjamin Williams, Esquire , our Governor ,
Captain – General and Commander in Chief , at Raleigh , the
17 day of Decr in the41th the year of our indepen
dence , & in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred
& thirteen
By command, Wm Hill [Lutry] Will Miller



State of North Carolina, No. 2367

To all to whom these presents shall come greeting

KNOW YE, That We, for and in consideration of the sum of Forty Shillings for every hundred acres hereby granted, paid into our treasury by Jacob Briles have given and granted, and by these presents do give and grant unto the said Jacob Briles a tract of land containing One hundred & fifty acres, lying and being in the county of Randolph on the Waters of Uharee Beginning on a Black Oak runs South 43 degrees West 33 Chs to a post Oak then North 5½ Chs to a White Oak then West 15 Chs to a Black Oak Fouts Corner then North 22½ Chs to a Black Oak then East 11 Chs & 22 links to his corner pine then North 20 Chs to a White Oak then West 15 Chs to a P Oak said Briles [old] corner then West 43 degrees North 19 Chs & 30 links to a hickory then East 20 Chs & 35 links to a Sassafras then North 6½ Chs to a stake in Lans line then East 29½ Chs to a stake in his own line then South 6½ Chs to a W O then West 15½ Chs to a B Oak then South 35 Chs to a White Oak then to the Beginning No 220 Entered 25th February 1810 No. 221 Entered 25 February 1810 as by the plat hereunto annexed doth appear; together with all woods, waters, mines, minerals hereditaments, and appurtenances to the said land belonging or appertaining: TO HOLD to the said Jacob Briles his heirs and assigns forever: Yielding and paying to us such sums of money, yearly, or otherwise, as our General Assembly from time to time may direct. Provided always, That the said grantee shall cause this grant to be registered in the Register's Office of our said county of Randolph within 12 months from the date hereof, otherwise the same shall be void & of no effect.

In testimony whereof, We have caused these our letters to be made patent and our great seal to be hereunto affixed.

Witness, Benjamin Williams, Esquire, our Governor, Captain-General and Commander in Chief, at Raleigh, the 17 day of Dec in the 41st year of our independence, & in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred & thirteen

By Command, Wm Hill Lutry Will Miller

Working through this 1816 deed reminded me just how valuable land records can be when sorting out families with repeating names—especially in a community like the Randolph County Briles clan. While this document doesn't immediately solve the "which Jacob?" question, it adds another piece to the puzzle and offers important clues for future research. By preserving the transcription, plat, and image, I can revisit this deed as new information surfaces and gradually refine my understanding of the Briles landholdings in early nineteenth-century North Carolina.

As always, Monday's Diggings turned up more questions than answers—but that's exactly what keeps genealogy so engaging.

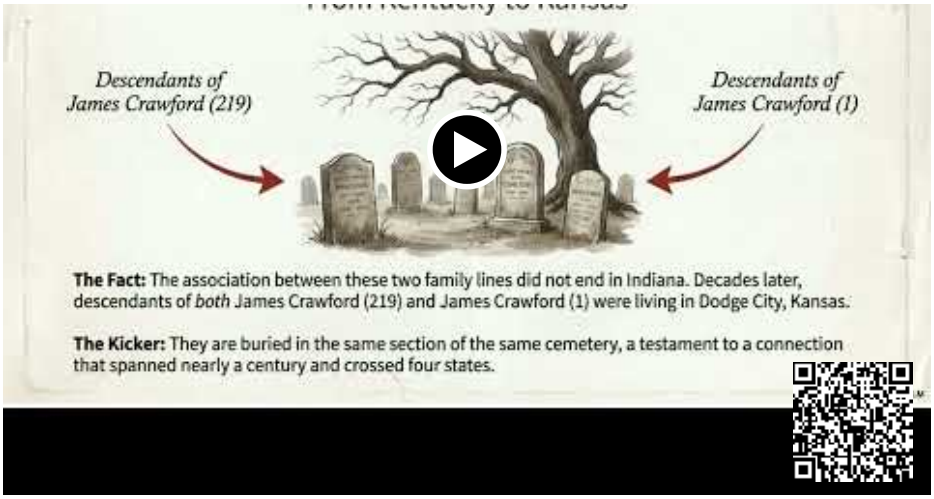
Analyzing Crawford Network Using Google Vids

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
December 9, 2025
Artificial Intelligence,Crawford
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/12/09/analyzing-crawford-network-using-google-vids/

As I mentioned in an earlier post, when it comes to experimenting with AI tools, I'm definitely more of a follower than a trailblazer. Fortunately, I follow some excellent leaders—one of them being Randy Seaver of Genea-Musings. Recently, Randy demonstrated how he used **Google Vids** to transform a Google Notebook LM slide deck into a polished video, and his post made the process look incredibly simple.

Intrigued (and inspired), I decided to give it a try. Using the *Crawford Connection* slide deck created by Google Notebook LM, I generated a video titled **"Crawford Network of Garrard County."** It came together quickly and easily—and I've uploaded the finished version to my YouTube channel for you to view.

https://youtube.com/watch?v=MnaZKoBthDM


Descendants of James Crawford (219)
Descendants of James Crawford (1)
The Fact: The association between these two family lines did not end in Indiana. Decades later, descendants of both James Crawford (219) and James Crawford (1) were living in Dodge City, Kansas.
The Kicker: They are buried in the same section of the same cemetery, a testament to a connection that spanned nearly a century and crossed four states.

To give you a sense of what Google Notebook LM worked from, I'm including the exact text I provided to generate the original slide deck. This is the foundation behind both the slides and the video.

Note: Numbers after names are the RootsMagic number in my genealogy file. Links are to my Ancestry tree.

One of my genealogy brick walls is my fourth great grandfather, James Crawford (219). James married Sally Duggins (1441) in Garrard county, Kentucky in 1799. This was a second marriage for Sally Duggins (1441). She had 2 sons by her first marriage to Alexander Duggins (639): Henry Duggins (481) and William A Duggins (482). Sally Duggins maiden name was Sally Smith (1441).

The area of Garrard county Kentucky prior to 1800 had several CRAWFORD families living there.

- Mary Crawford (1413) purchased land from Richard Cave and lived along Sugar Creek before her marriage to Alexander Moore (11622). The land was sold after Mary Crawford's marriage to Alexander Moore.
- James Crawford (1443) owned land along Paint Lick Creek on the eastern edge of Garrard County. His wife, Rebecca Anderson (1444), was the daughter of John Anderson (10083). Rebecca's first husband was John Maxwell (13444). Rebecca and John Maxwell had a son named John Maxwell (13445) before the father's death.
- John Crawford (6251)'s wife is believed to be Rebekah Douglas (168). Rebekah (168) purchased land in Garrard County from George Douglas (10320). Rebekah (168)'s land was on the dividing line between Boone Creek and Sugar Creek.
- Moses Dooley was an original land owner along Sugar Creek. His land was the home of the "Old Sugar Meeting House". Both Mary Crawford (1413) and Rebekah Crawford (168) likely attended events at the Old Sugar Meeting House.
- William Crawford (10065) also owned land in Garrard County before migrating to Pulaski county and then to southeast Missouri.
- Andrew Crawford (27367) is believed to be a brother to William (10065), John (6251) and James (1443).
- James Crawford (1) married Martha Knight in 1793 in Lincoln County, Kentucky. He is believed to be the son of Rebekah (Douglas) Crawford (168)
- James Crawford (1)'s probable sister, Sarah Crawford (171) married William David Sellers (5228) [son of Nathaniel Sellers (1422)] in 1796 in Lincoln County, Kentucky. Rebekah Crawford (168) gave permission for the marriage.
- James Crawford (1)'s probable sister, Mary Crawford (170) married James Sellers (174) [son of Nathaniel Sellers (1422)] in 1791 in Lincoln County, Kentucky. Rebekah Crawford (168) gave permission for the marriage.
- William Sellers (5228) and James Crawford (219) purchased land as tenants in common in Preble County, Ohio in 1816.
- James Crawford (219) and James Crawford (1) owned adjoining land in Preble County, Ohio. James Crawford (1) and Nelson Crawford (199) [son of James Crawford (219)] migrated to Warren County, Indiana about the same time. Descendants of both lines lived in Dodge City, Kansas and are buried in the same section of the cemetery.
- Mary Crawford (1413) is believed to be the mother of James Crawford (219). Unfortunately, no record has been found connecting Mary Crawford (1413) to a first spouse or to children.

DNA

- William Nelson Crawford (9886) is a brick wall for another researcher. DNA confirms a relationship to descendants of James Crawford (1) and Martha Knight (2)

- yDNA places descendants of James Crawford (219) in the R1b-01B Ardmillan group. Also in the group are descendants of James Crawford (1443) and James' probable brother, John Crawford (6251).
- I have 22 matches with descendants of James Crawford (219) and Sally Smith Duggins (1441).
- I have 3 matches with DUGGINS descendants from Salley Smith Duggins (1441)
- I have 89 shared matches with the 3 matches descending from Sally Smith Duggins (1441) and her first husband Alexander Duggins (639)
- I have 1286 shared matches with the 22 matches descending from James Crawford (219) and Sally Smith Duggins (1441).
- I have 38 matches with descendants from James Crawford (1443) and Rebecca Anderson (1444) with 949 shared matches
- I have 13 matches with descendants of Rebecca Anderson (1444) and her first husband John Maxwell (13444) with 652 shared matches
- I have 56 matches with descendants of Mary Crawford (170) / James Sellers (174) or Sarah Crawford (171) / William David Sellers (5228) with 1024 shared matches
- I have 13 matches who descend from James Crawford (1) and Martha Knight (2) with 1091 shared matches
- I have 8 matches with descendants of William Crawford (10065) and Elizabeth (10069) with 791 shared matches

Exploring these new AI tools continues to surprise me—especially when a simple experiment results in something as polished as this video. While I may not be leading the charge in adopting new technology, following the examples shared by others in the genealogy community has opened doors I didn't expect. Turning a text summary into a slide deck and then into a video was remarkably easy, and it offers yet another way to share complex family connections in a clear, visual format. I'm excited to see where these tools lead next and how they might help bring more of my research to life.

Retirement Day

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
December 10, 2025
Artificial Intelligence,Crawford
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/12/10/retirement-day/

Randy Seaver of Genea-Musings has recently been using AI to create “day in the life” stories about his ancestors, and his posts inspired me to try something similar. Out of curiosity, I first asked ChatGPT to write a narrative about my grandfather’s service during World War I—and the results were surprisingly moving. Encouraged by that experience, I decided to take the idea a step further and explore another important moment in his life: **the day he retired from the railroad**.

A Day in the Life: Leon Crawford’s Retirement Day — May 13, 1960

The morning of **May 13, 1960**, began like countless others for **Leon R. Crawford**, yet he felt the difference long before the sun reached over the Dodge City yards. For forty-three years, the rhythm of his life had been set by the Santa Fe Railroad—switch lists, yard calls, locomotive rumble, and the camaraderie of the men who shared those long, noisy shifts. But this morning, the air felt lighter. Today, he wasn’t just showing up for work. He was closing a chapter.

Leon buttoned his familiar bib overalls, the same kind he’d worn since he first hired on as a **yard helper in December 1916** 1965-eXTRA-railroad-retirement-…. His hands knew every pocket, every faded spot. Winnie wished him a good day, though both of them knew it was more than that—this was the start of something new. After four decades, the Santa Fe would no longer dictate his schedule.

At the yard, the engines were already warming up, sending out deep, comforting vibrations. Leon had spent years as an **engine foreman**, and even now he could identify which locomotive was idling by the pitch of its hum. Engine **1528**, the one in the newspaper photograph, was there on the track—almost as if waiting for him.

The men gathered early. Andy R. West. M.E. Hawkins. Oscar W. Hefner. John F. Pippitt. Fellows who’d sweated alongside him in the Kansas heat, shared thermos coffee on icy mornings, and trusted him with their safety when the switching got complicated. They knew today mattered.

Someone said, “Leon, let’s get a picture,” and the group arranged themselves almost automatically—Leon stepping down from the locomotive as the others watched. The **Dodge City Globe** photographer snapped the image that would later appear with the caption:

“RAILROAD MAN RETIRES — L. R. Crawford, shown stepping down from locomotive…” 1965-eXTRA-railroad-retirement-…

Leon smiled—shy, dignified, proud.

After the photo, the men shook his hand, some squeezing harder than usual. A few slapped his shoulder. The railroad wasn’t just a job. It was a brotherhood, one Leon had belonged to since long before some of these younger men were born.

Later that morning, Leon reviewed his final paperwork. His **Employee’s Certificate of Termination of Service** carried his signature with “May 13, 1960” written in ink 1965-eXTRA-railroad-retirement-…. The company had already processed his **retirement annuity application**, and the Santa Fe prepared a **Certificate of Honor** recognizing **43 years of faithful service**, dated **July 8, 1960** 1965-eXTRA-railroad-retirement-….

He held it carefully. That certificate meant something deep to him—not because of the formality, but because it represented decades of responsibility done well.

During the shift, Leon ran through the motions one last time—checking switches, talking with yard crews, stepping up into the cab with the ease of a man who had done so tens of thousands of times. The engine felt steady under his boots. Familiar. Even comforting.

But he also felt something else—a quiet contentment. He had earned this ending.

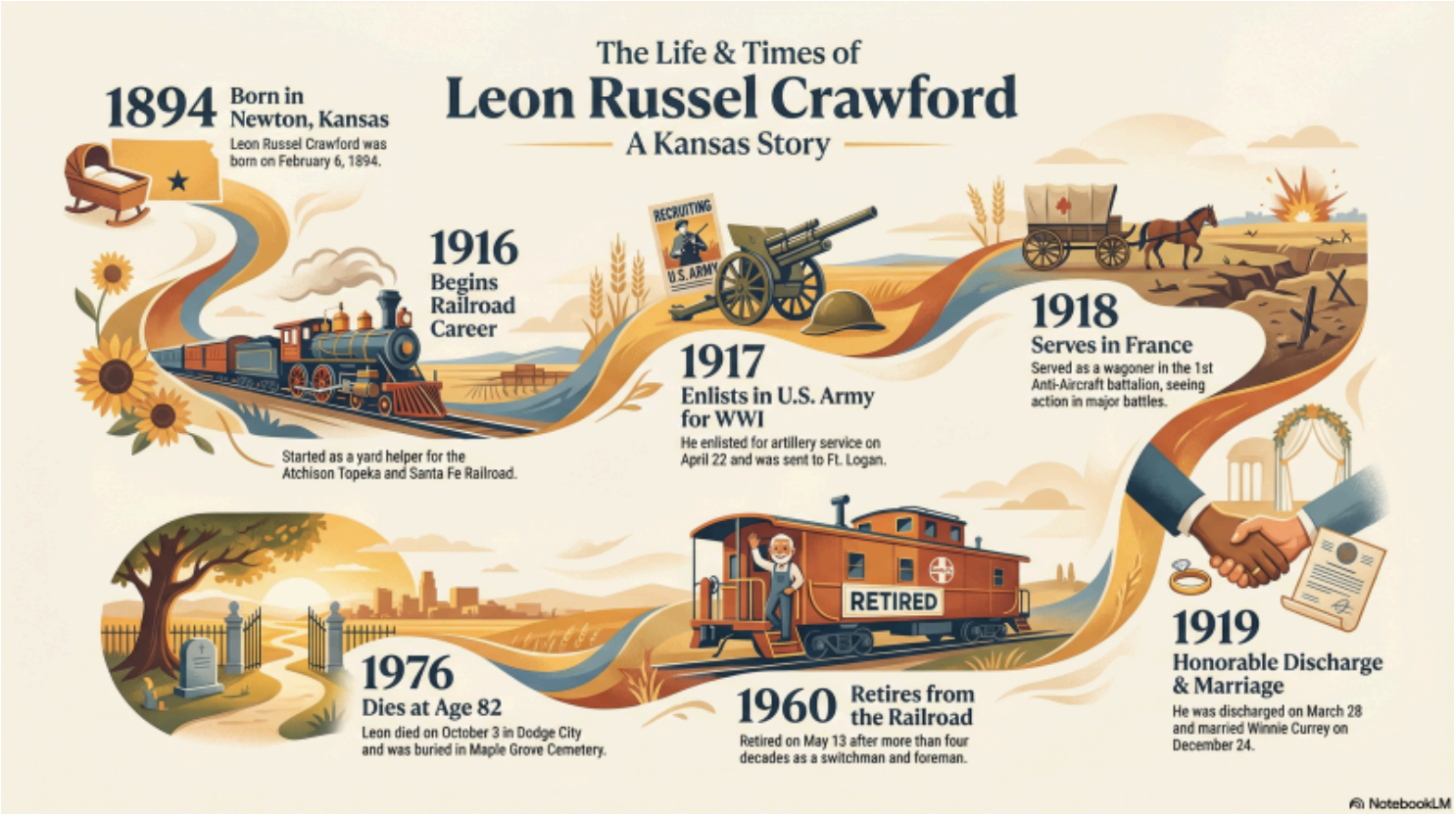
As the day wrapped up, he made one final walk through the yard. The clang of metal couplings, the hiss of air brakes, the low rumble of engines—all the sounds he’d lived with since he was twenty-two—followed him like a farewell song. Before heading home, Leon turned once more toward the line of locomotives. The rails stretched west, shining in the afternoon light.

Winnie had supper waiting for him. The house at **911 Second Avenue** felt especially warm that evening. They talked a little about the day, about the men he had worked with, about the photograph that would appear in the paper. Mostly, though, they enjoyed the simple quiet—the rare luxury of a night when the railroad wasn’t calling.

Leon didn’t say much about what the future held. But he knew one thing for certain:

After 43 years, the Santa Fe had been a good home. And now, at last, he was heading down a new track—one he didn’t have to switch or signal for. One he could simply ride.

An infographic created by Google Notebook LM beautifully illustrates the milestones of Leon’s life, with his long railroad career serving as the thread that ties it all together.


The Life & Times of
Leon Russel Crawford
A Kansas Story
1894 Born in Newton, Kansas
Leon Russel Crawford was born on February 6, 1894.
1916 Begins Railroad Career
Started as a yard helper for the Atchison Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad.
RECRUITING
U.S. ARMY
1917 Enlists in U.S. Army for WWI
He enlisted for artillery service on April 22 and was sent to Ft. Logan.
1918 Serves in France
Served as a wagoner in the 1st Anti-Aircraft battalion, seeing action in major battles.
1919 Honorable Discharge & Marriage
He was discharged on March 28 and married Winnie Currey on December 24.
RETIRED
1960 Retires from the Railroad
Retired on May 13 after more than four decades as a switchman and foreman.
1976 Dies at Age 82
Leon died on October 3 in Dodge City and was buried in Maple Grove Cemetery.
NotebookLM

Conclusion

Exploring my grandfather Leon Crawford's story through different forms—narrative, music, and visual timelines—has given me a deeper appreciation for the life he lived and the legacy he left behind. His journey from a young Kansas rail worker to a World War I veteran and, ultimately, a respected Santa Fe engine foreman reminds me how many quiet, steady lives have shaped the communities we know today. Whether told through an AI-crafted "day in the life," a heartfelt song, or an illustrated infographic, Leon's story continues to speak of dedication, resilience, and the enduring strength of family history. Sharing his experiences ensures that his path, like the tracks he worked for more than four decades, remains part of the landscape of our memory.

AI Pedigree Chart Failures

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
December 11, 2025
Artificial Intelligence
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/12/11/ai-pedigree-chart-failures/

Have you seen the chalkboard pedigree charts people have been sharing in the **Genealogy and Artificial Intelligence** Facebook group?

I've been trying to create one of my own and, so far, it has been a **major** failure.

Some of my early attempts used the suggested "Steve Little" style prompt with my ahnentafel embedded. Here's the version I started with:

> **Role**
>
> You are an expert Genealogical Visualization Designer.
>
> **Input Data (Ground Truth)**
>
> Use the following Ahnentafel list as the absolute source of truth.
>
> CRITICAL: Do not hallucinate names. Do not omit dates.
>
> Generation 1
>
> 1. Marcia Crawford
>
> Generation 2
>
> 2. Eugene Crawford born 8 Dec 1927; married 9 June 1951; died 14 Sept 2006.
>
> Generation 3
>
> 3. Leon Crawford: born 6 Feb 1894; married 24 Dec 1919 ; died 3 Oct 1976.
> 4. Winnie Currey: born 30 June 1903; died 11 Feb 1992.
>
> Generation 4
>
> 5. Judson Crawford: born 15 April 1866; married 24 Dec 1890; died 19 Feb 1949.

6. Josie Hammond: born 9 Feb 1874; died 27 Sept 1954.
7. Hiram Currey: born 23 Oct 1866; married 13 May 1891; died 15 Sept 1943.
8. Winifred Hutchinson: born 6 May 1871; died 23 Sep 1913.

Task

Generate a Chalkboard Pedigree Chart visualizing the provided data.

Visual Constraints (The "Nano Banana" Protocol)

1. Legibility First: Every name and date from the Input Data must be strictly legible.
2. Layout: Use a standard, horizontal pedigree structure.
3. Medium: Realistic chalk on a slate-grey blackboard.

Color Methodology (The "Lawrence-Little" Scheme)

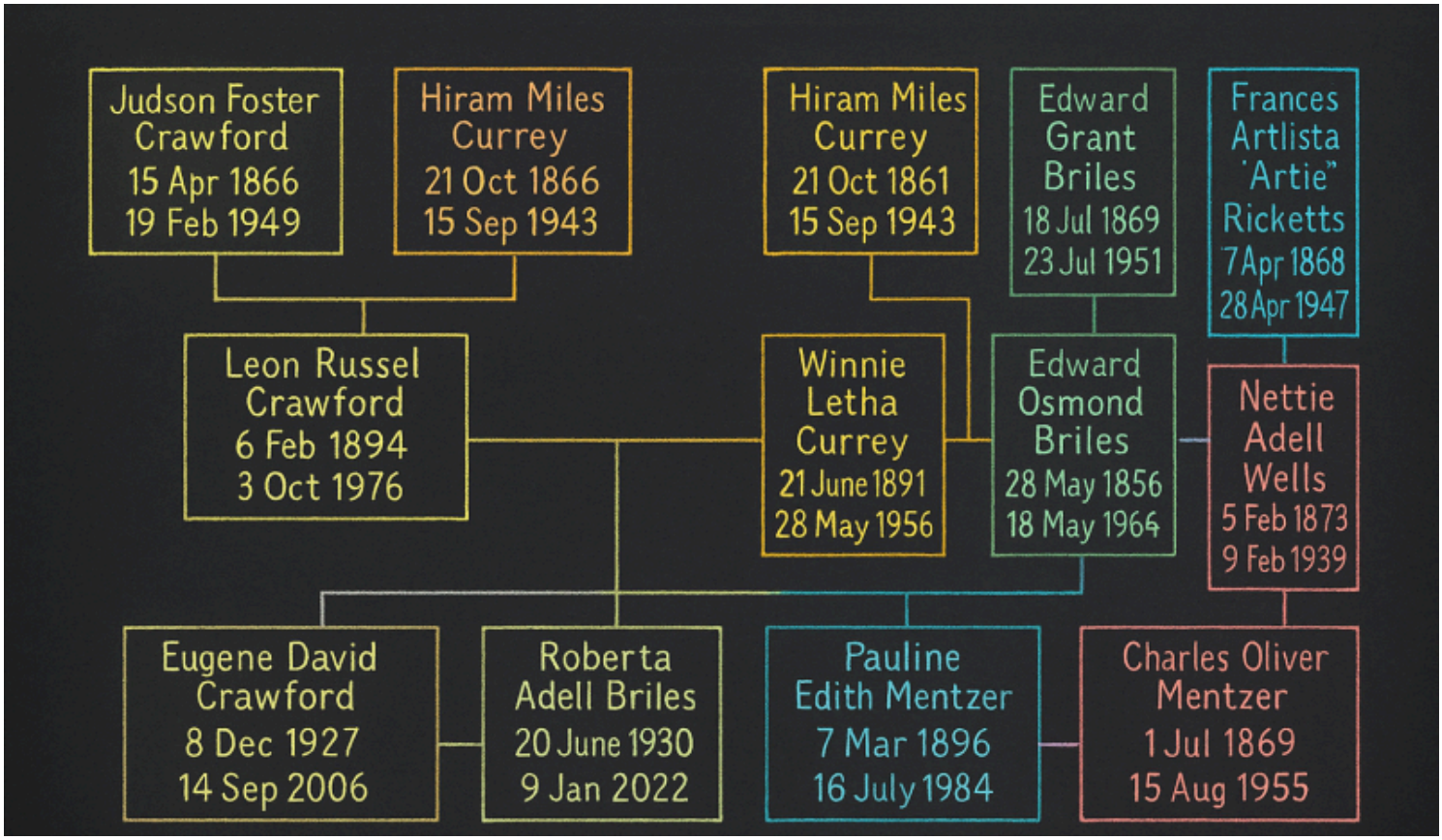
Apply this specific color coding to the text/borders of each node:

1. Luminance (Generation Depth) changes from fully saturated for oldest generation fading into soft pastels
2. Hue Mixing (Inheritance): The hue of a child node MUST be the visual *equal mix** of their parents' hues.

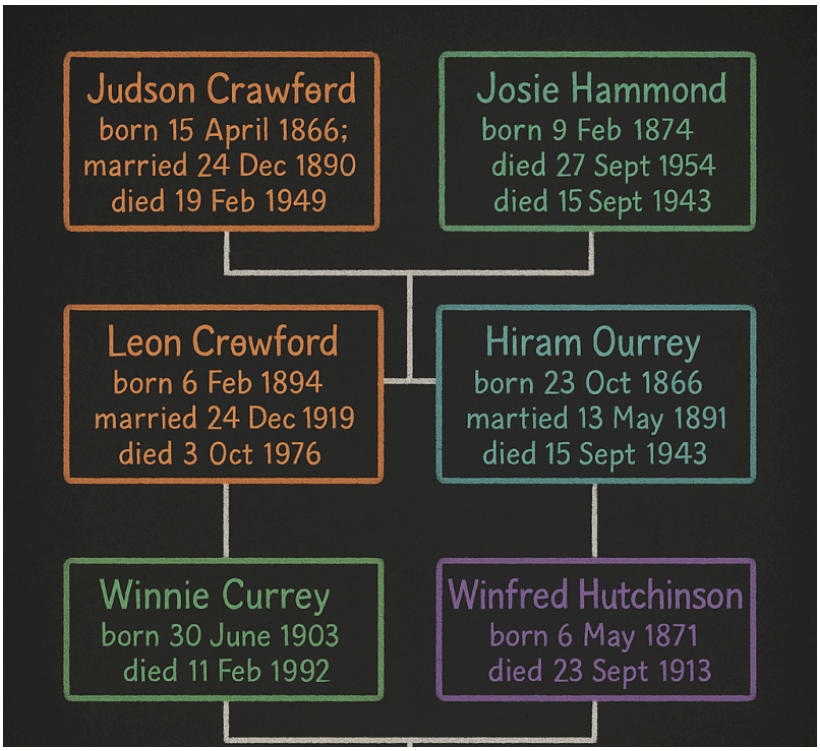
Output Goal

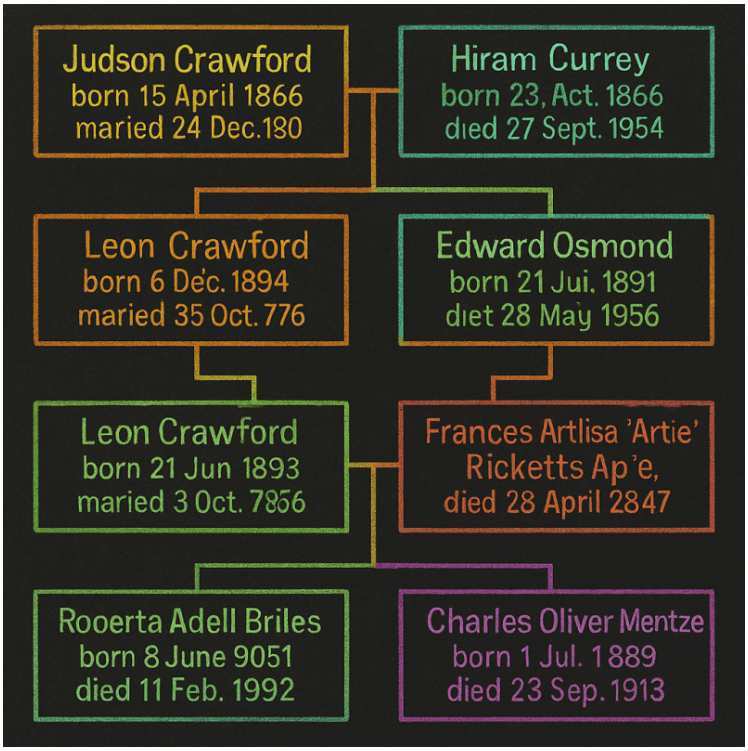
A diagram where the text is readable enough to be verified against the source list, using color to show genetic flow from vivid ancestors to pastel descendants.

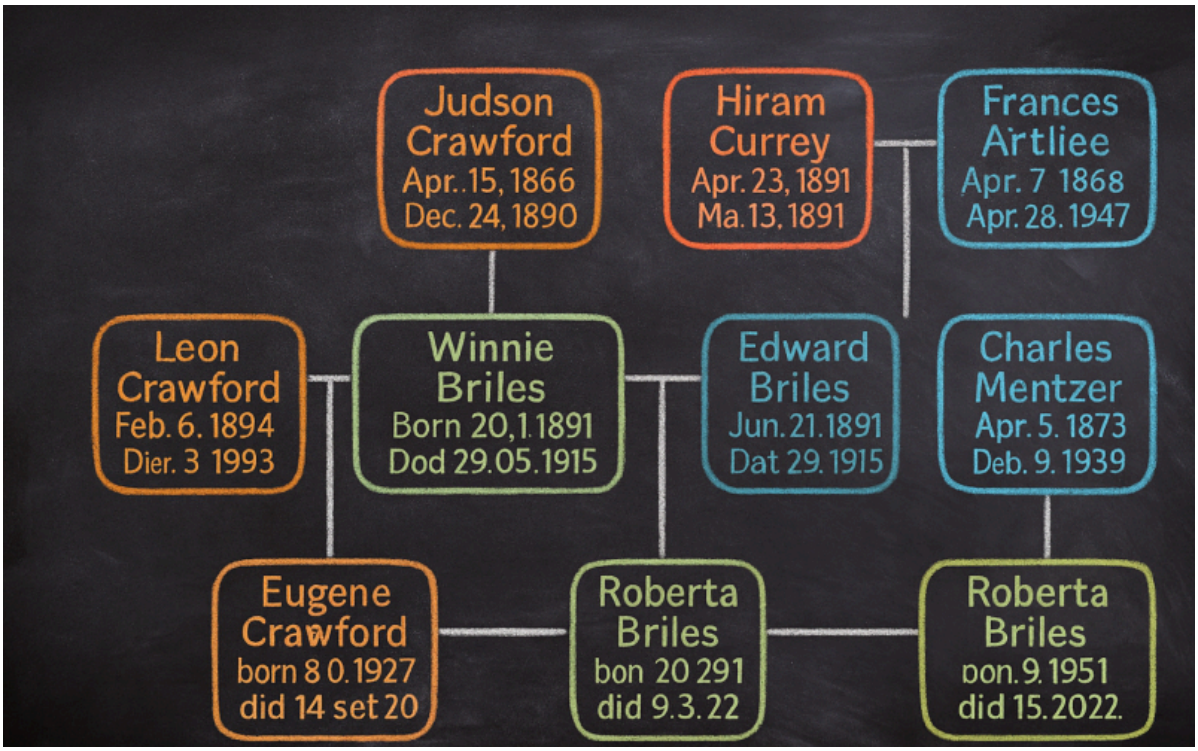
Below is the first attempt by ChatGPT to create the chart.

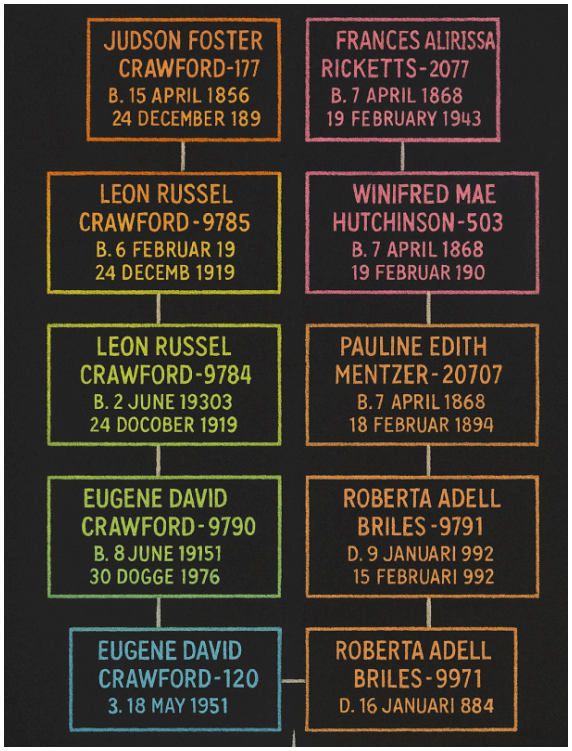


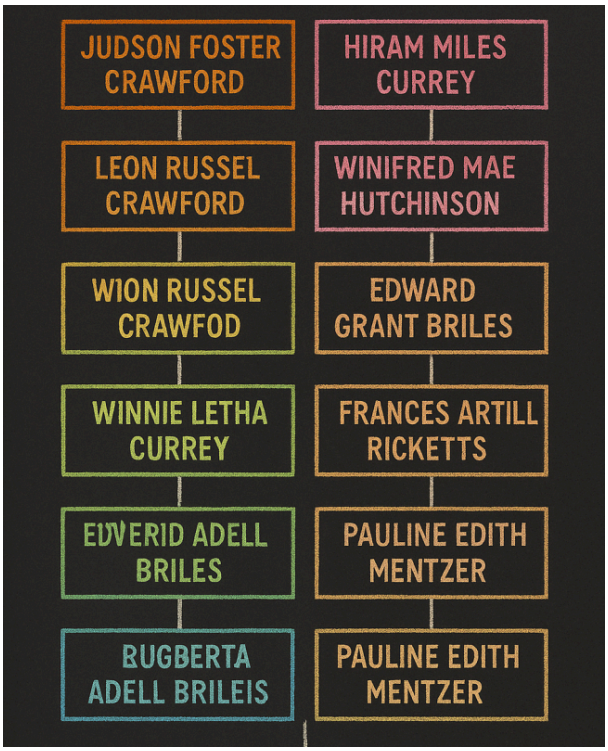
According to Steve Little, one is supposed to *chat and iterate*. So I did. I pointed out the errors and eventually got ChatGPT to **interpret the ahnentafel correctly**—it could tell who were parents and who married whom. Unfortunately, the *image output* remained strange. Names were misspelled, dates were altered, and sometimes two men were connected as a couple.


Judson Crawford
born 15 April 1866;
married 24 Dec 1890
died 19 Feb 1949
Josie Hammond
born 9 Feb 1874
died 27 Sept 1954
died 15 Sept 1943
Leon Crewford
born 6 Feb 1894
married 24 Dec 1919
died 3 Oct 1976
Hiram Ourrey
born 23 Oct 1866
martied 13 May 1891
died 15 Sept 1943
Winnie Currey
born 30 June 1903
died 11 Feb 1992
Winfred Hutchinson
born 6 May 1871
died 23 Sept 1913

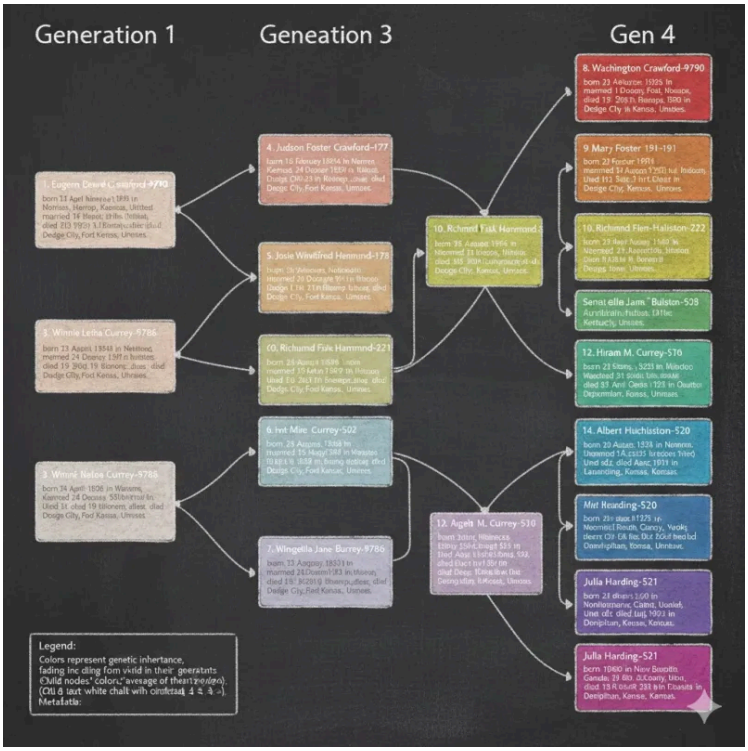

Judson Crawford
born 15 April 1866
maried 24 Dec.180
Hiram Currey
born 23, Act. 1866
died 27 Sept. 1954
Leon Crawford
born 6 Dec. 1894
maried 35 Oct. 776
Edward Osmond
born 21 Jui. 1891
diet 28 May 1956
Leon Crawford
born 21 Jun 1893
maried 3 Oct. 7856
Frances Artlisa 'Artie'
Ricketts Ap'e,
died 28 April 2847
Rooerta Adell Briles
born 8 June 9051
died 11 Feb. 1992
Charles Oliver Mentze
born 1 Jul. 1889
died 23 Sep. 1913

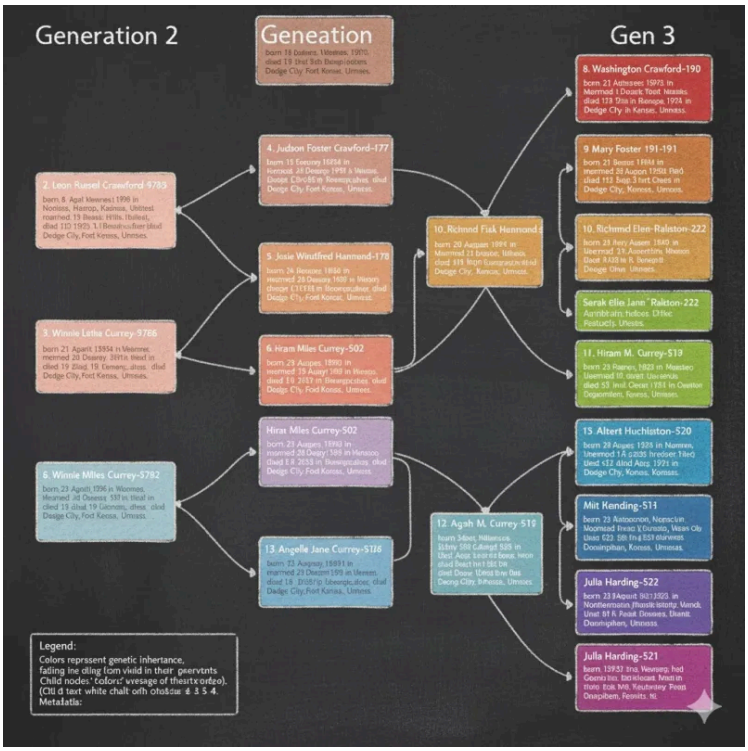

Judson Crawford
Apr. 15, 1866
Dec. 24, 1890
Hiram Currey
Apr. 23, 1891
Ma. 13, 1891
Frances Artliee
Apr. 7 1868
Apr. 28. 1947
Leon Crawford
Feb. 6. 1894
Dier. 3 1993
Winnie Briles
Born 20,1.1891
Dod 29.05.1915
Edward Briles
Jun. 21.1891
Dat 29. 1915
Charles Mentzer
Apr. 5. 1873
Deb. 9. 1939
Eugene Crawford
born 8 0.1927
did 14 set 20
Roberta Briles
bon 20 291
did 9.3.22
Roberta Briles
bon. 9. 1951
did 15.2022.


JUDSON FOSTER CRAWFORD-177
B. 15 APRIL 1856
24 DECEMBER 189
FRANCES ALIRISSA RICKETTS-2077
B. 7 APRIL 1868
19 FEBRUARY 1943
LEON RUSSEL CRAWFORD-9785
B. 6 FEBRUAR 19
24 DECEMB 1919
WINIFRED MAE HUTCHINSON-503
B. 7 APRIL 1868
19 FEBRUAR 190
LEON RUSSEL CRAWFORD-9784
B. 2 JUNE 19303
24 DOCOBER 1919
PAULINE EDITH MENTZER-20707
B. 7 APRIL 1868
18 FEBRUAR 1894
EUGENE DAVID CRAWFORD-9790
B. 8 JUNE 19151
30 DOGGE 1976
ROBERTA ADELL BRILES-9791
D. 9 JANUARI 992
15 FEBRUARI 992
EUGENE DAVID CRAWFORD-120
3. 18 MAY 1951
ROBERTA ADELL BRILES-9971
D. 16 JANUARI 884



Since I knew that Steve Little had created a **Gemini "Gem"** for this purpose, I tried that next.




Generation 2
Geneation
Gen 3
2. Leon Russel Crawford-9785
4. Judson Foster Crawford-177
5. Josie Winifred Hammond-178
3. Winnie Letha Currey-9786
6. Hiram Miles Currey-502
10. Richmnd Fisk Hammond
8. Washington Crawford-190
9 Mary Foster 191-191
10. Richmnd Elen-Ralston-222
Serah Ellie Jann `Ralston-222
11. Hiram M. Currey-519
6. Winnie Miles Currey-5782
Hiram Miles Currey-502
13. Angelie Jane Currey-5116
12. Agah M. Currey 519
13. Altert Huchiston-520
Mit Kending-513
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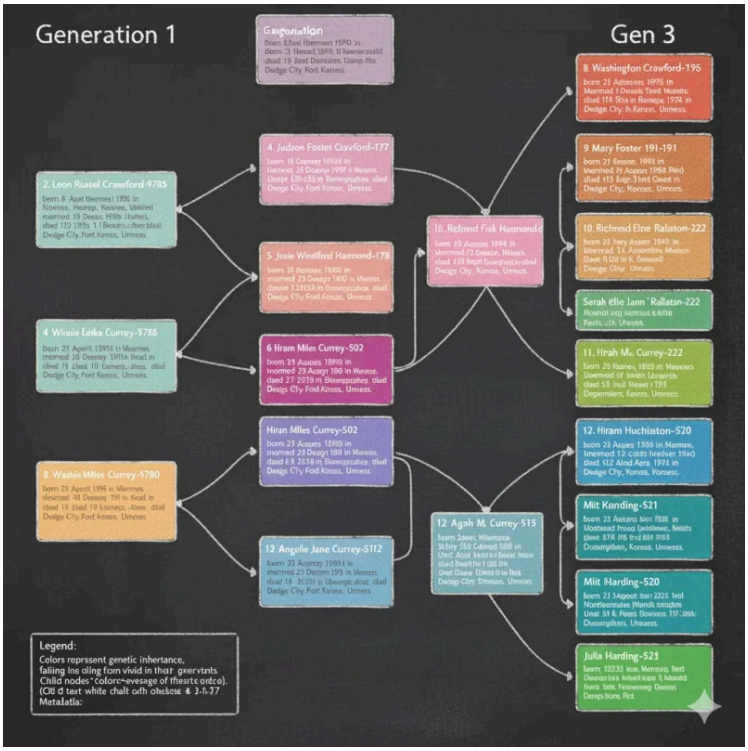
Generation 1
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2. Leon Russel Crawford-9785
4. Judson Foster Crawford-177
5. Josie Winifred Hammond-178
4 Winnie Letha Currey-9786
6 Hiram Miles Currey-502
10. Richmnd Fisk Hammond
8. Washington Crawford-195
9 Mary Foster 191-191
10. Richmnd Elne-Ralston-222
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11. Hirah Mn. Currey-222
Hiran Miles Currey-502
8. Washin Miles Currey-9780
12 Angelie Jane Currey-5112
12 Agah M. Currey 515
12. Hiram Huchiston-520
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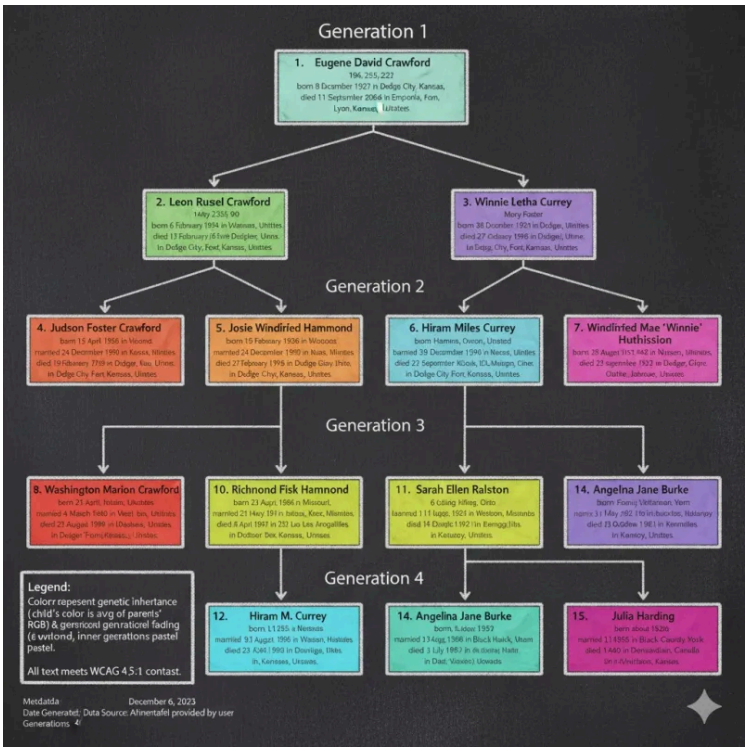
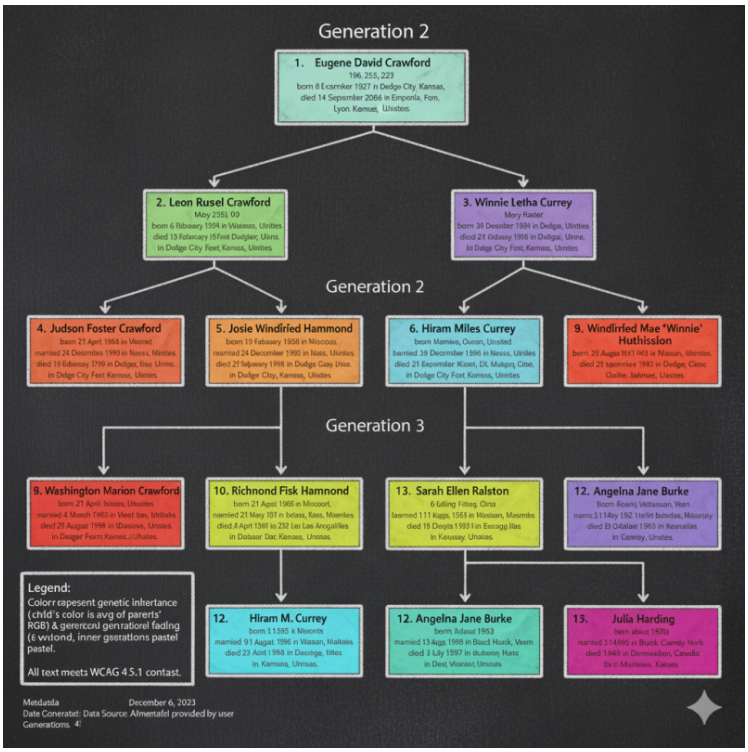


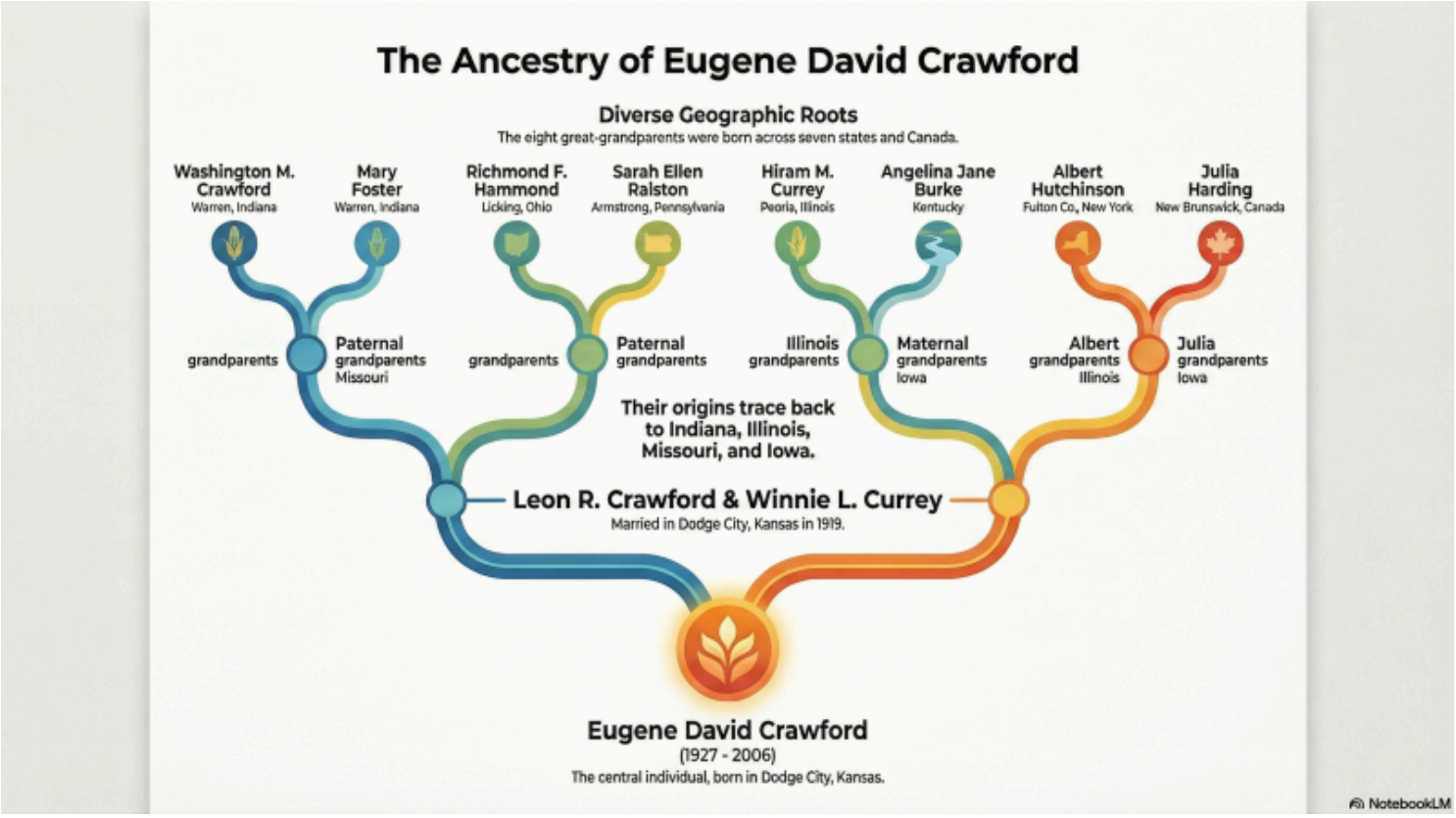
Again, I fed it the ahnentafel, provided the pedigree chart, and carefully described the errors. For my final Gemini attempt, I used a very direct prompt:

> Create a pedigree chart for Eugene Crawford show his ancestors in a horizontal chart starting with him on the left and branching to the right to show his parents, grandparents and great grandparents.



The result was **closer**, but still not right. The chart was vertical instead of horizontal. The first three generations were somewhat recognizable, but many names were misspelled and most of the dates were incorrect. The last two generations were completely wrong.

So I made one more try—this time with **Google Notebook LM**. I uploaded a correct pedigree chart and asked it to create an infographic. This attempt finally produced an **accurate depiction of the ancestral lines**, but the generation containing Eugene's grandparents was missing the names entirely. Beautiful lines, but incomplete genealogy.



At this point, I have several attractive but flawed chalkboard charts, all of which you'll see embedded in this post. They are great examples of why **genealogists still have to double-check everything** AI produces, especially when our family data is involved.

Hopefully, after attending the upcoming **"Navigating the AI Frontier: A Free Symposium …"**, I'll understand more about how these tools work—and maybe I'll finally coax one of them into drawing an accurate chalkboard pedigree chart for my Crawford family.

Friday Find – The 1866 Marriage of Ida M. Wells and Jerome Gregory

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
December 12, 2025
Michigan,Wells
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/12/12/friday-find-marriage-of-ida-wells/

Today's find from my **WELLS** notebook is a marriage record documenting the 1866 wedding of **Ida M. Wells** 9*XM*1 – *J*489XM1−J48 and **Jerome Gregory** 93*DD* – 93*X*93DD−93X. The young couple married in Calhoun County, Michigan, and their record is preserved in the county's early marriage books.

I located the record in **Calhoun County, Michigan, Marriage Records 1836–1943**, available on FamilySearch. This particular entry appears in **Volume 5**, which begins on image 869, with the marriage recorded on **image 955 of 1072**.

Marriage Record Transcription

Calhoun County, Michigan
Marriage Records 1836–1943

"Calhoun, Michigan, United States records," images, FamilySearch (https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:939J-4PSM-37?view=explore : 6 Dec 2025), image 955 of 1072; Michigan. County Court (Calhoun County). Image Group Number: 004653762.

Page 164

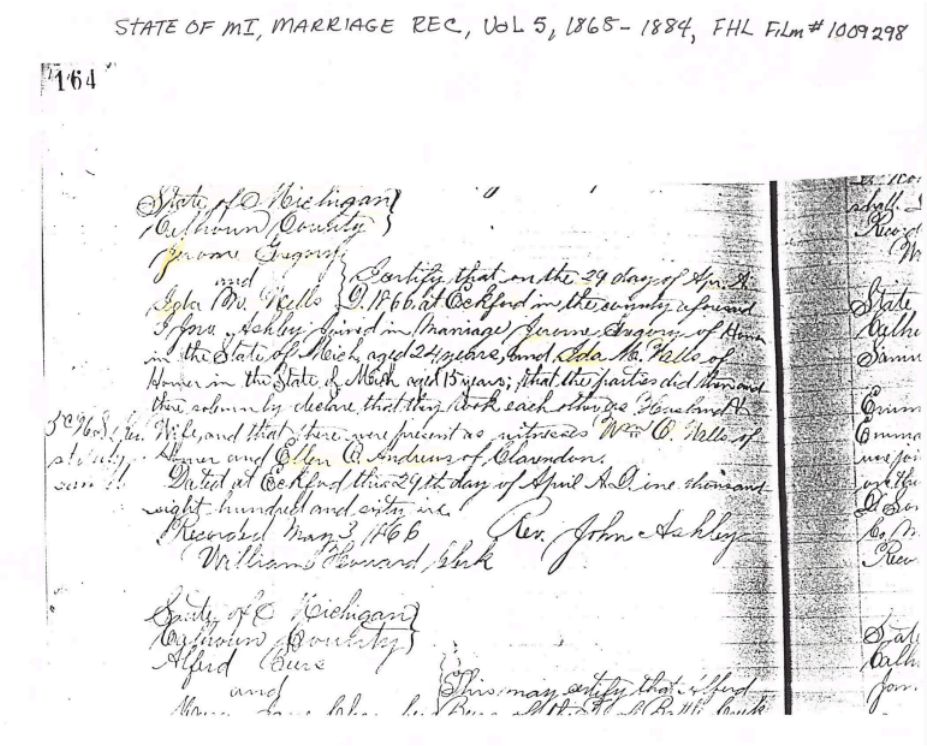
Dated April 20th A.D. 1866.
Recorded May 22nd 1866
William Howard, Clerk
Francis A. Stace
Justice of the Peace

State of Michigan
Calhoun County

Jerome Gregory
and
Ida M. Wells

I certify that on the 29 day of Apr. A.D. 1866, at Eckford in the County aforesaid, I, Jos. Ashley, joined in marriage **Jerome Gregory** of Homer in the State of Mich, aged 24 years, and **Ida M. Wells** of Homer in the State of Mich, aged 15 years; that the parties did then and there solemnly declare that they took each other as Husband & Wife, and that there were present as witnesses **Wm O. Wells** of Homer and **Ellen O. Andrews** of Clarendon.

Dated at Eckford this 29th day of April A.D. one thousand eight hundred and sixty six.
Recorded May 3 1866
William Howard, Clerk
Rev. John Ashley


STATE OF MI, MARRIAGE REC, VOL 5, 1865-1884, FHL FILM # 1009298

164

State of Michigan
Calhoun County
Jerome Gregory
and
Ida M. Wells
I certify that on the 29 day of Apr. A.D. 1866 at Eckford in the County aforesaid I Jos. Ashley joined in Marriage Jerome Gregory of Homer in the State of Mich aged 24 years, and Ida M. Wells of Homer in the State of Mich aged 15 years; that the parties did then and there solemnly declare that they took each other as Husband & Wife, and that there were present as witnesses Wm O. Wells of Homer and Ellen O. Andrews of Clarendon.
Dated at Eckford this 29th day of April A.D. one thousand eight hundred and sixty six
Recorded May 3 1866
William Howard, Clerk
Rev. John Ashley

State of Michigan
Calhoun County
Alfred Bure
and

This simple entry in the Calhoun County marriage book adds another valuable piece to the Wells family puzzle. Not only does it document Ida's young age at marriage, but it also names two witnesses—**Wm. O. Wells** and **Ellen O. Andrews**—providing helpful clues for placing the couple within their wider family and community. As with so many discoveries tucked into old county volumes, this record reminds me how important it is to revisit long-forgotten notes and sources. You never know what gems may be waiting to be rediscovered.

ABC Biography: Pauline Edith Mentzer Briles

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
December 13, 2025
ABC Biography,Briles
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/12/13/abc-biography-pauline-edith-mentzer-briles/

Early Life and Family Background

Pauline Edith Mentzer was born **28 March 1896** in Woodson County, Kansas, the daughter of **Charles Oliver Mentzer** and **Nettie Adell (Wells) Mentzer**. She grew up surrounded by extended Mentzer and Wells family connections in Woodson and neighboring Coffey County, Kansas. Her childhood years are well documented through census records showing the family living in rural townships where farming and small-community life shaped her early experiences. ughter of Charles and Nettie Mentzer, with an older sister **Gladys**, a **twin brother, Paul**, and two younger brothers, **Leslie** and **Herbert**. The Mentzer siblings appear frequently together in newspaper items—visiting relatives, attending school events, and helping one another through illnesses—reflecting a warm family dynamic. These early bonds remained strong throughout their lives, showing up again and again in Pauline's later visits, gatherings, and shared family milestones.

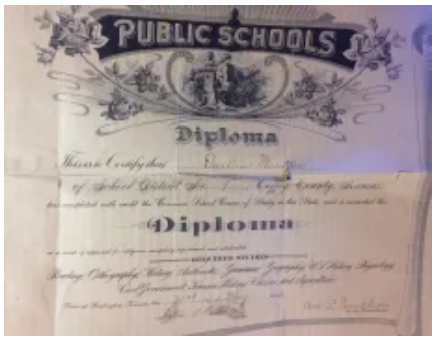
Childhood & Schooling

By 1900, four-year-old Pauline was living with her parents in **North Township, Woodson County**. In 1905, the family was enumerated in **Neosho Falls**, and by 1910 they had moved to **Liberty Township, Coffey County**. These moves reflect the mobility that was

common for Kansas farming families seeking better land, employment, or rental opportunities.

In **January 1911**, Pauline suffered a broken leg and received medical treatment in Kyle, Kansas—an event noted in the Burlington paper, and likely a memorable episode for the entire family. Despite the setback, she continued her schooling and successfully completed the **Common School Course of Study** on **31 May 1913**, an educational milestone for rural Kansas students at the time.

A year later, Pauline was attending **high school in Yates Center**, showing she was continuing her education beyond the basic rural school curriculum.



Community Life and Young Adulthood

Newspaper snippets provide glimpses into Pauline's active social life. In **1914–1915**, she and her sister Gladys visited their parents frequently, attended gatherings, and participated in events in the Crandall and Rose communities. These details paint a picture of a young woman who was well connected, socially active, and devoted to her family.

In **April 1915**, she stayed home to help care for her ill mother—an early example of the caregiving role she would assume repeatedly throughout her life.

Marriage to Edward Osmond "E.O." Briles

On **29 October 1915**, Pauline married **Edward Osmond Briles** in Yates Center, Kansas. Edward, born **21 June 1891** in Burlington, Kansas, was the son of **Edward Grant Briles** and **Frances Artlissa (Ricketts)**. The marriage announcements published in multiple area newspapers show that their wedding was considered notable within both Woodson and Coffey County communities.

The couple began married life in **Iola**, later living in **Buffalo (Wilson County)** and eventually settling long-term in **Emporia**, Lyon County, Kansas.

Children of Pauline and Edward Briles

Pauline and Edward were the parents of five children:

1. **Walter Emery Briles**
   Born **14 Aug 1917**; married Leola Fern Baxter, then Fern (Fay) Blair;
   died **14 Jul 1982** in Biloxi, Mississippi.
2. **Kenneth Eugene Briles**
   Born **26 Sep 1918** in Vernon, Kansas;
   died **10 Jun 1919** in Kansas City, Missouri;
   buried in Coffey County, Kansas.

3. **Letha Marie (Briles) Doolittle**
   Born **14 Sep 1924** in Iola;
   married **George Lewis Doolittle** in 1944;
   died **26 Jun 2012** in California.
4. **Roberta Adell (Briles) Crawford**
   Born **20 Jun 1930** in Buffalo;
   married **Eugene David Crawford** in 1951;
   died **9 Jan 2022** in Lenexa, Kansas.
5. **Barbara Ann (Briles) Thompson**
   Born **22 Aug 1934** in Emporia;
   married **Marvin A. Thompson** in 1954;
   died **3 May 1982** in Manhattan, Kansas.

The death of baby Kenneth in 1919 was a sorrow Pauline carried for life; notes from 1922 describe her and her family decorating his grave on Decoration Day.

Life in Emporia and Community Involvement

The Briles family moved to Emporia by the 1930s, where they became deeply rooted over the decades. Pauline's life in Emporia is richly documented through city directories, newspaper items, and club memberships.

She joined the **Christian Church in Emporia on 4 March 1934**, beginning a lifelong association with church organizations. In the 1940s–1960s, she was active in the **East Sixth Avenue Club**, the **Whittier Unit**, and the **Harmony Builders Class**. Her name appears frequently in the Emporia Gazette as she hosted guests, attended social events, or took part in club activities.

She also participated in or assisted with her family's business interests. The Briles family operated the **Strand Theater** in Emporia, and Pauline is mentioned in connection with its operations, eventual closure, and equipment sale in the 1950s.

In later years—after her children were grown—Pauline worked occasionally as a **babysitter**, lending a helpful hand to local families, including the Mellingers.

Later Life and Family Connections

Even into her 60s and 70s, Pauline remained actively involved with her children and grandchildren. Newspaper items describe her visits to Dodge City, Manhattan, San Bernardino, and other places where her family lived. She attended picnics, birthdays, and reunions—notably a **Briles family reunion in 1974**.

Pauline was widowed when Edward Osmond Briles died on **28 May 1956**. She continued living in Emporia for nearly three more decades, moving several times but always staying connected to family and church.

Death and Burial

Pauline Edith (Mentzer) Briles died on **16 July 1984** in Emporia at age 88. She was buried beside her husband at **Memorial Lawn Cemetery** in Emporia, Kansas. Her long life spanned eras of tremendous change—from horse-and-wagon Kansas farms to airplanes, automobiles, and space exploration—but through it all, she remained a constant pillar of family, community, and faith.

Saturday Night Genealogy Fun

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
December 14, 2025
SaturdayNightGenealogyFun
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/12/14/saturday-night-genealogy-fun-180/

Calling All Genea-Musings Fans!

It's Saturday night again—
time for some more Genealogy Fun!

Join in, accept the mission, and execute it with precision. This is your chance to *virtually* sit on Genea-Santa's lap and tell him about your Christmases past. 🎅

So rev up the **olde thynking cap**, cue the *Mission: Impossible* music, and get ready—
your mission, should you decide to accept it (and keeping with the Christmas theme), is:

🎄 This Week's Challenge

1️⃣ **Share memories of December holiday gatherings and celebrations** with your family—whether as a child, young adult, parent, grandparent, great-grandparent, aunt or uncle, nibling, cousin, or in-law.

What is the most unusual or unexpected gift you ever received—or witnessed being given—at a holiday gathering?

My grandparents were married on Christmas Eve in 1919. To mark each anniversary, my grandfather bought my grandmother a single red rose. After twelve years, the tradition evolved into a dozen red roses every Christmas Eve.

Then, in 1969, my grandmother surprised my grandfather with a wedding ring. When they married, she couldn't afford a ring, and while working for the railroad, he wouldn't have been able to wear one anyway. Fifty years later, it became the perfect gift—not only celebrating Christmas, but honoring their golden wedding anniversary and a lifetime of love.

2️⃣ **What is one holiday tradition your family has lost or stopped doing** over the generations—and why did it end?

Some might say our family has lost the tradition of large Christmas gatherings. Even when I was a child, we only gathered with my dad's parents. His siblings had passed away, and my mom's siblings were scattered from Kansas to California.

After my grandparents died, we did continue to gather for a time. Locations changed from year to year, and as nieces and a nephew married and formed their own families—and as winter weather and work schedules complicated travel—those Christmas gatherings became harder to plan.

Today, instead of meeting in winter, we gather at a lake in late fall. The season has changed, but the heart of the tradition—family time together—remains.

Monday's Diggings – 1787 Land Purchase of Adam Broils

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
December 15, 2025
Briles,Randolph County, NC
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/12/15/mondays-diggings-1787-land-purchase-of-adam-broils/

While continuing to *dig* through my BRILES folder, I uncovered another Randolph County, North Carolina deed—this one dating from 1787. It documents a land grant issued to **Adam Broils**, an early member of the Broils/Briles family, for property situated along Coatly's Creek in Randolph County. Finds like this not only shed light on land ownership but also help place our ancestors within a specific geographic and historical landscape.

1787 Deed, Randolph County, North Carolina – Adam Broils

Source: *Randolph. Deeds 1782–1786, 1779–1794, 1785–1787*
"Randolph, North Carolina, United States records," images, FamilySearch (https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3QS7-L967-5NGS?view=explore : accessed Dec. 6, 2025), image 441 of 551; Image Group Number 007560685.
Volume 3 (1785–1787)

(Transcription)

170
State of North Carolina No. 390
To all to whom these presents shall come Greeting – Know Ye that we for & in consideration of the Sum of Ten pounds for every hundred acres of Land paid into our treasury by **Adam Broils** have given & granted & by these presents do give & grant unto the said Adam Broils a tract of land containing one hundred acres lying & being in our County of Randolph [on] Coatly Creek. Begining at a Black Oak in Rushes line and runing East three Chs & half to his corner White oak then North on said line fifteen Chs to a pine then East Twenty Chs to a post oak then South forty four chs to a Stake then west Twenty three & half chs to a stake in the old line then North on said line To the Begining – As by the plat hereunto anexed Doth appear together with all woods waters mine minerals Herditaments & appurtenances to the said land Belonging or appertaining to hold to the said Adam Broils his heirs & assigns for ever – Yielding & paying to us Such sums of mony Yearly or otherwise as Our Genall assembly from time to time may Direct – – – – – – Provided always that the said Adam Broils Shall Cause this grant to be Registered in the Registers office of our said County of Randolph within Twelve Months from the sale hereof Otherwise the Same Shall be void & of No Effec.
In Testimony whereof we have caused these our letters to be To be made patent & our great Seal to be hereunto affixed – – – Witness **Richard Caswell**, Esqr, our Governor, Captain General & commander in chief at Kinston on the eighteenth day of August in the Twelfth year of our Independence & in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred & Eighty Seven – – –
Regd The 20th of Decr 1787 –

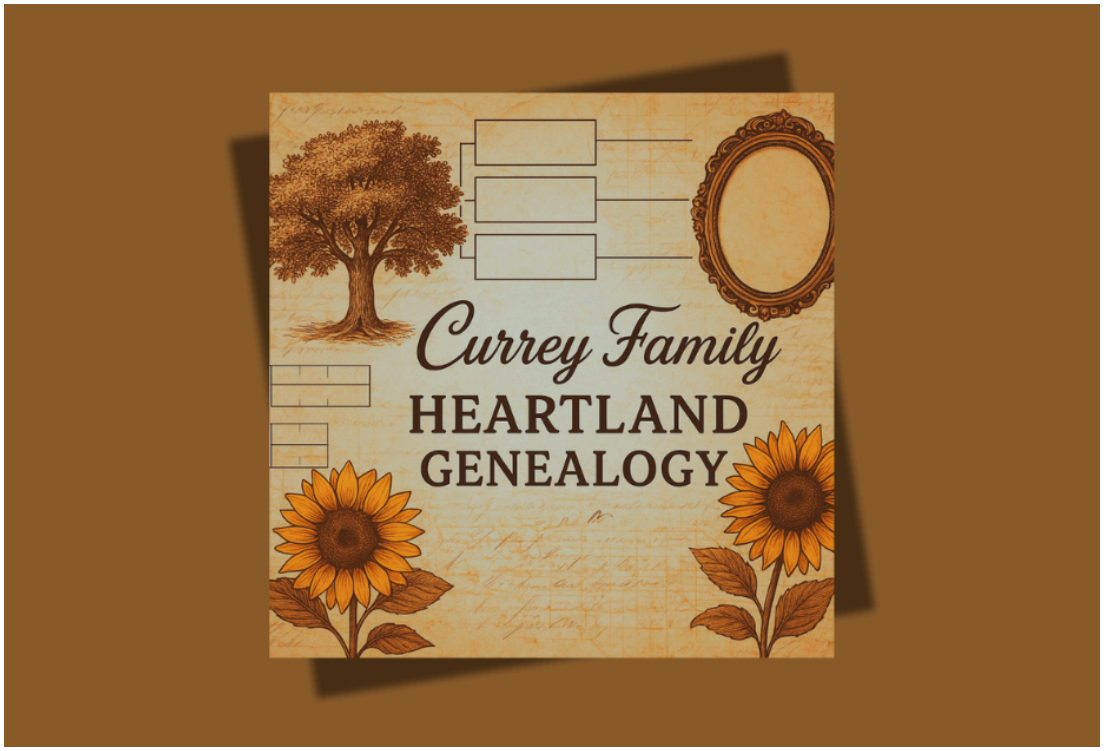
Why This Deed Matters

Adam Broils, son of **Conrad Broil**, would be my 5th great-granduncle. This 1787 land grant places Adam firmly in Randolph County during the post-Revolutionary era and contributes another piece to the puzzle of documenting the movements and property holdings of the Broils/Briles family.

Land records like this one often serve as anchors in our research—tying individuals to specific locations, revealing neighbors, and helping us reconstruct communities over time. Each deed I uncover reinforces the presence of the Broils/Briles family in this part of North Carolina before their westward migrations in later generations.

A Time in the Life of Winnie Letha Currey (1903–1925)

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
December 16, 2025
ABC Biography,Currey
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/12/16/a-time-in-the-life-of-winnie-letha-currey-1903-1925/



Winnie Letha Currey: A narrative of upheaval, separation, and rebuilding

The Last Day of Childhood (Autumn 1913)

In late September 1913, ten-year-old Winnie Currey's world quietly shifted on its axis. Her mother, Winifred Mae Hutchinson Currey, died unexpectedly, leaving behind seven children whose lives would soon scatter in different directions. Winnie was old enough to understand loss, yet still young enough to feel the ground drop beneath her feet. The family—once held together by a mother's daily rhythms—entered a period where nothing felt certain. Life at home could no longer continue as it had been.

New Homes, New Realities (1913–1914)

Almost immediately, the Currey siblings were divided. Baby Alma, not yet two, went to live with the DeShazer family in Franklin County. Seven-year-old Earnest was placed with another family whose name has been lost to time. Herbert, Myrtle, Mary, and Winnie remained for a while with their father, Hiram, but the household was far too broken and burdened to remain intact.

In June 1914, another major shift came: the three older girls—Mary, Myrtle, and Winnie—were placed in a children's home in Kansas City, Missouri. The routines of chores, schedules, and institutional life were undoubtedly different from their life in Lansing, Kansas. This was a time defined by adjustment: not just to new surroundings, but to the ache of missing siblings and the uncertainty of what came next.

A Brief Return to Family (1916)

By June 1916, fragments of their original family unit began to reassemble. Winnie and her sister Mary moved back with their father in Kansas City and attended Horace Mann School. Both girls graduated that June—a milestone that must have felt like proof that progress was possible, even after so much disruption. For a moment, life regained a bit of structure. Perhaps there was even hope that stability was within reach.

Sisters Together Again—And Growing Up Fast (1917)

Events continued to shift. Winnie, Mary, and Myrtle moved together to North Kansas City, living with their Aunt Nora. Instead of lessons at school, their days now centered around work in a factory—young women navigating adulthood much earlier than expected. At 13 or 14, Winnie was expected to keep pace with her older sisters, contributing to the household and learning to support herself.

In March 1917, Myrtle married Claude Gaskill and moved to Dodge City. Her marriage created the next fork in the Currey family path.

Becoming an Aunt, Becoming Needed (1918)

By early 1918, Winnie found herself in Dodge City as well, helping Myrtle through the birth of her first child. She was only 14, yet entrusted with real responsibility. This period may have been the most stabilizing since her mother's death. Living with Myrtle, helping with the baby, joining the First United Methodist Church—Winnie was building a life shaped by family, faith, and service. Narrative Report for Winnie Let…

A Young Bride in a New Home (1919–1921)

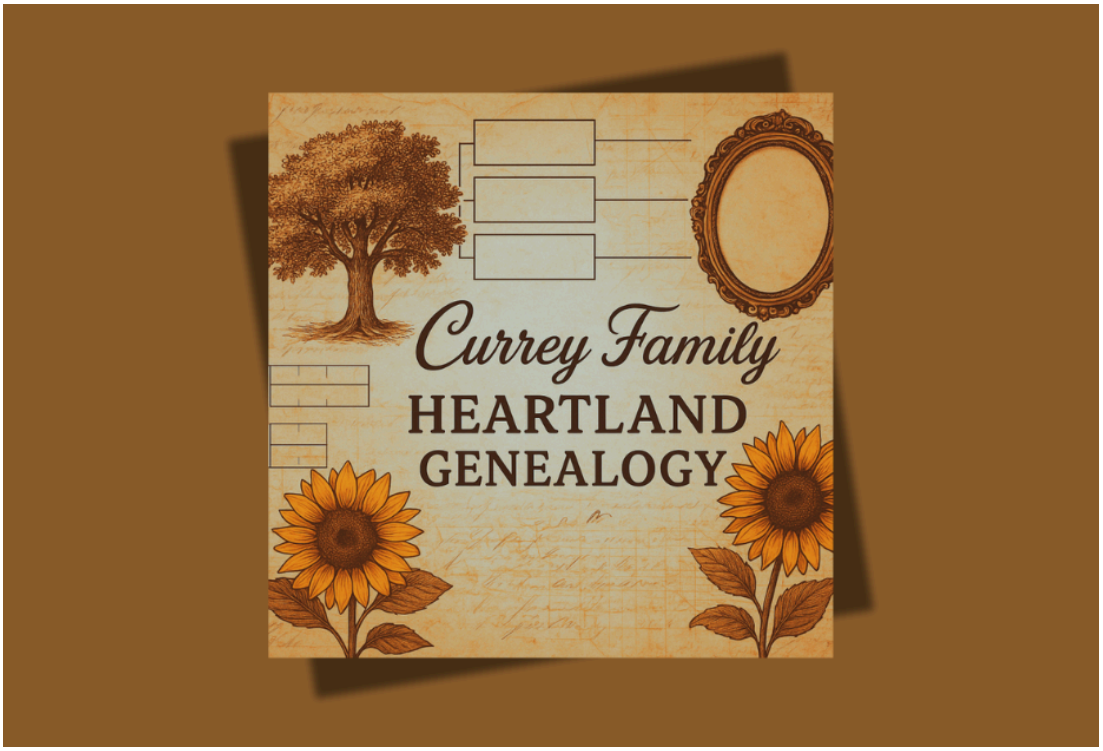
On Christmas Eve 1919, sixteen-year-old Winnie Currey married Leon Russel Crawford in Dodge City, stepping into adulthood with hope and determination after years of upheaval. By early January 1920, the young couple had set up their first home on Avenue A, where they began building a life together. In May 1921, they welcomed their daughter, Betty Jean—but their joy quickly turned to heartbreak when the baby lived for only one day. The experience must have been devastating for Winnie, who had already endured so much loss in her youth. Yet even in the shadow of this grief, she and Leon continued on, holding tightly to each other as they navigated this painful chapter of early married life.

Finding Her Place in Dodge City (1924–1925)

By 1924, the Crawford family had settled at 510 Avenue G. Winnie appeared again in the 1925 Kansas census, now 21 years old—still young, but with a decade of upheaval, work, grief, responsibility, and resilience behind her. Her siblings were scattered across western Kansas and beyond: her father and younger siblings in Gray County, her sister Mary in Garden City, and her brother Herbert far away in Ogden, Utah. Yet despite all that distance, Winnie's life was firmly rooted. She had created her own household, her own community, and her own forward path.

Do You Use Shared Facts?

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
December 17, 2025
Artificial Intelligence,Currey,RootsMagic
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/12/17/do-you-use-shared-facts/



For years, I've avoided using shared facts. Somewhere along the way, I had read the advice *not* to rely on shared facts because they don't transfer well via GEDCOM. Even the RootsMagic help page on "Sharing Facts" reinforces this concern, noting that "shared facts are not always transferable to other programs or websites." That warning was enough to keep me from using the feature.

But recently, while working with AI tools, I discovered just how much information can be lost when shared facts aren't part of a person's narrative.

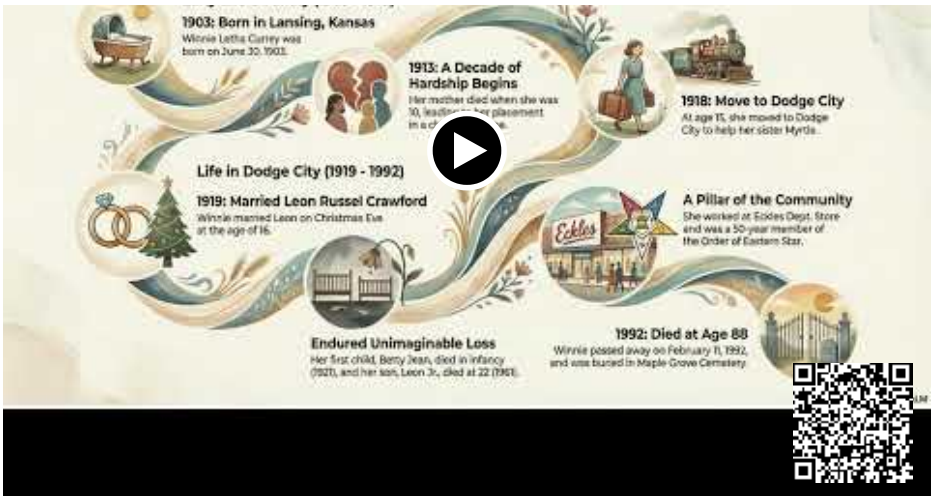
I wanted to create a "time in the life" story for my grandmother, Winnie Letha Currey, focusing on roughly ten years—from the death of her mother in 1913 through the gradual reunification of the Currey siblings about twelve years later. These were years filled with upheaval, separation, and major turning points that shaped who she became.

Yet when I generated her narrative report in RootsMagic, many of those life-altering events were missing. They appeared in her siblings' and father's timelines, but not in hers—simply because I had never shared those facts with her profile.

To fix this, I manually edited her narrative report to include her mother's death, the placement of siblings in other homes, the girls' time in a Kansas City children's home, and other events that unquestionably shaped her teen years. I used this expanded report to create my **"A Time in the Life of Winnie Letha Currey"** post with ChatGPT.

Then, to experiment further, I fed the extended narrative into Google Notebook LM, which produced both an audio overview and an infographic. Those pieces became the foundation for the following video.

https://youtube.com/watch?v=mMgIOwhLiz4


1903: Born in Lansing, Kansas
Winnie Letha Carrey was born on June 30, 1903.
1913: A Decade of Hardship Begins
1918: Move to Dodge City
At age 15, she moved to Dodge City to help her sister Myrtle.
Life in Dodge City (1919 - 1992)
1919: Married Leon Russel Crawford
Winnie married Leon on Christmas Eve at the age of 16.
A Pillar of the Community
She worked at Eckles Dept. Store and was a 50-year member of the Order of Eastern Star.
Endured Unimaginable Loss
1992: Died at Age 88
Winnie passed away on February 11, 1992, and was buried in Maple Grove Cemetery.

This process made something very clear:
these extended events mattered far more to my grandmother's story than a census record, street address, or routine timeline item ever could. And yet, because I wasn't sharing facts, they weren't appearing where they needed to.

Curious how others handled this, I searched for guidance from experienced RootsMagic users and found a few helpful sources:

- **Randy Seaver's 2017 post, "Using the Share Button in RootsMagic Facts."**
- **RootsMagic Help:** "Moving or Copying a Fact."
- **RootsMagic Help:** "Sharing Facts."
- **A February 19 Facebook discussion** where someone noted that shared facts don't transfer to Ancestry and asked whether there was *ever* a situation where sharing a fact still makes sense. One commenter offered an explanation that perfectly illustrated why I *should* have been using shared facts all along.

This experience has me rethinking how I document the relationships and events that affect multiple people in a family. If the goal is accurate storytelling—and ensuring that life-changing events appear in every relevant narrative—shared facts may be worth using, even with their GEDCOM limitations.

This whole experience reminded me that genealogy software features aren't just technical tools—they shape the stories we're able to tell. By skipping shared facts, I unintentionally silenced parts of my grandmother's childhood that deeply influenced who she became. Rebuilding her narrative through AI made those gaps impossible to ignore. Going forward, I suspect I'll be far more intentional about sharing facts among family members, even if the GEDCOM limitations remain. After all, our goal as genealogists is to honor the truth of a life, and sometimes that truth depends on events that ripple across an entire family, not just one individual.

A Time in the Life of Edward Osmond Briles and the Lyric Theater (1932–1933)

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
December 18, 2025
Briles
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/12/18/a-time-in-the-life-of-edward-osmond-briles-and-the-lyric-theater-1932-1933/

A narrative drawn from court records and local newspaper reports

In 1932, **Edward Osmond Briles** managed the **Lyric Theater** in Emporia, Kansas—a small, modestly profitable picture house trying to survive the Great Depression. Moviegoing was one of the few affordable entertainments left, and Sunday had quietly become the most popular day for theaters across Kansas. All around Emporia—little towns throughout the region—Sunday films played without incident. But Emporia held fast to its **blue laws**, a set of ordinances forbidding unnecessary labor and commercial activity on the Sabbath.

For months, Briles watched potential customers leave town on Sundays, heading to places where theaters were open. He believed these old restrictions hurt small businesses—and Emporia's economy—and he finally decided it was time for a test.

Sunday, September 10, 1933 — The Test Case Begins

On Saturday, Briles publicly announced that the Lyric would open the next day. "*We probably will be arrested,*" he said, noting that he was acting on advice from his attorney and was determined to "*go to bat on the question*." Emporia, he believed, needed Sunday shows again. 1933-Arrests-courts-Edward-Osmo…

At **2:00 p.m. Sunday**, he opened the doors.
Police promptly entered the projection booth and found Briles himself running the projector. Miss Glennis Wasson sold tickets in the lobby. Both were taken to the police station. Briles posted **$100 bond** and returned to the theater.

Warned that every show would result in another arrest, he pressed on. Later that evening, officers again found the theater open. This time the bond was **$200**. Briles made no secret of his intentions: he wanted a legal ruling, and arrest was part of the plan. He skipped the scheduled 4:00 show only because officers told him another arrest awaited.

Thus began a **ten-week standoff** between a theater manager and the city.

Ten Consecutive Sundays — Arrests 1 through 15

Each Sunday brought the same pattern:

- Briles opened the Lyric.
- Police appeared, observed him or an employee working, and issued another arrest.
- Patrons continued to attend—even filling the theater on some weekends.

By early November, Briles had been arrested **13 and then 14 times**, and soon after, **15 times in total**, all for the same offense: **operating a motion picture theater, compelling employees to work, and selling tickets on Sunday**, in violation of Emporia's ordinances. 1933-Arrests-courts-Edward-Osmo…

He posted bond each time, often $200, and kept going.

The Police Court Convictions

Ten cases were tried in police court. Briles was convicted in each and fined:

- **$25** for opening/operating the theater
- **$25** for requiring employees to work
- **$100** for selling merchandise (tickets)

Total per case: **$150**
Total for ten cases: **$1,500** (though not all were enforced immediately due to appeals) 1933-Arrests-courts-Edward-Osmo…

Briles appealed to the district court. He believed that a higher court ruling might overturn Emporia's ordinance or force a statewide reconsideration.

District Court Trial — November 13, 1933

Two cases—each containing **three counts**—were selected to represent the larger dispute.

Briles waived arraignment and pled **not guilty**.
A jury of 12 was sworn in.

At trial:

- The city presented evidence showing he had opened the Lyric and operated moving picture equipment on Sunday.
- They emphasized that Briles not only worked himself but also directed employees—ticket sellers, ticket takers, machine operators—to perform labor on the Sabbath.
- Briles called **no witnesses** and presented **no evidence** in his defense.

The jury deliberated and returned **six guilty verdicts** (three counts in each case).
The convictions exposed him to **$300 in fines**. 1933-Arrests-courts-Edward-Osmo…

The newspapers reported that Briles had hoped to take the issue to the Kansas Supreme Court—financial support from other theater operators had been promised but never came. Without such help, his attorney advised closing on Sundays rather than continuing the fight.

The City's Argument for a Heavy Penalty

In a detailed motion, the city argued that:

- Briles had acted *"willfully, deliberately, and intentionally."*
- He had operated shows all day, every Sunday—sometimes continuously from afternoon to night.

- Attendance was strong; some houses were full.
- Even at a conservative estimate of **300 tickets per Sunday**, he earned about **$30 per Sunday**, or **$300 total** across the ten Sundays. 1933-Arrests-courts-Edward-Osmo…

Therefore, the city claimed, a fine must **exceed the profit** or it would be "no penalty at all."
The city asked for a **$300 fine plus costs**, which would nullify any gain and deter others.

Briles' Own Response — A Letter to the Editor

On November 21, the Emporia Gazette printed Briles' heartfelt explanation:

- He insisted he had done nothing wrong.
- He stressed that people who enjoyed Sunday movies outnumbered those opposed.
- He noted that Emporia's economy suffered as residents traveled elsewhere for entertainment.
- He felt that enforcement of the law was inconsistent and selective.
- He proposed a community-driven process similar to Fort Scott, where repeal depended on signatures from 51% of local taxpayers.

His tone was not defiant but disappointed—especially for the patrons who loved Sunday pictures. 1933-Arrests-courts-Edward-Osmo…

Sentencing — December 9, 1933

Briles appeared with his attorney.
The court found no reason to alter the jury's verdicts.

He was adjudged guilty on all six counts in the two appealed cases and fined a total of **$60**, plus costs (a reduction from the $300 recommended at various stages). A handwritten note clarified the fine as **$10 for each of the first two counts in each case**—totaling **$40**—with additional costs bringing it to **$60**. 1933-Arrests-courts-Edward-Osmo…

After months of conflict, dozens of arrests, and an intense legal battle, the fight ended quietly. Briles agreed not to show Sunday movies while his motion for retrial was pending—and ultimately, the Sunday shows ceased.

A Snapshot of a Community Struggle

The story of **E. O. Briles and the Lyric Theater** was more than a dispute over fines:

- It reflected changing cultural expectations in the 1930s.
- It revealed divisions between traditional Sabbath observance and modern entertainment.
- It showed how local economies and Depression-era realities clashed with inherited laws.
- And it captured the courage (or stubbornness) of a small-town theater man willing to be arrested fifteen times to test the boundaries of community values.

For a few intense months in 1933, the Lyric Theater became the center of a civic debate—one that played out in courtrooms, newspapers, and the projection booth where Briles continued to thread film through the projector, determined to bring Sunday movies to Emporia.

Family Stories

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
December 18, 2025
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/my-family/

In Story, Voice, and Song

This page serves as a central place to explore and revisit a growing collection of family stories shared here on the blog. Rather than repeating content, it brings together links to original posts that feature narratives, audio overviews, and original songs created to help preserve and share the lives of our parents, grandparents, and earlier generations.

At the heart of these stories are traditional genealogy reports built from documents, photographs, census records, newspapers, and family memories. Those carefully researched reports provided the foundation for everything that follows. From that base, a variety of AI tools were used to help reinterpret the research into different formats—ABC-style biographies, “day in the life” and “time in the life” narratives, audio overviews, and original songs. The facts did not come from AI; they came from the records. The technology simply helped translate that research into forms that are easier to read, listen to, and experience.

The links below are organized by generation—parents, grandparents, and beyond—making it easy to follow family lines and to expand this page over time as more biographies and stories are added. Each link leads to the original blog post, where the full narrative, audio, or video can be read, watched, or listened to in context.

My hope is that this page makes it easier to explore these stories, revisit favorite moments, and discover new connections—helping keep our family history alive not just as names and dates, but as lived experiences remembered and shared across generations.

Parents (Second Generation)

Eugene and Roberta (Briles) Crawford

- Eugene’s Military Career – A Narrative
- A Sad Christmas
- Christmas of Joy and Sorrow

Grandparents (Third Generation)

Leon Russel Crawford (1894-1976)

- ABC biography: Leon Crawford
- Exploring Leon Crawford’s Story through AI Created Media
- A Day in the Life of Leon Crawford – Wagoner, Battery D, 1st Anti-Aircraft Battalion
- A Day in the LIfe: Part 2 – Audio overview and song
- Retirement Day

Leon’s Siblings:

- Bernice (Crawford) Allen – ABC Biography
- Marion Richmond Crawford
- Helen (Crawford) Horton – ABC Biography
- Hugh Judson Crawford – ABC Biography
- Hugh Judson Crawford – Audio Overview
- Hugh Judson Craword – Hugh’s Song
- Esther (Crawford) Noll – ABC Biography
- Esther (Crawford) Noll – Esther’s Song
- Lois (Crawford) Maden – ABC Biography
- Lois (Crawford) Maden – ABC Song

Winnie Letha Currey (1903-1992)

- ABC Blography: Winnie Letha Currey
- A Video Tribute to My Grandmother
- A Time in the Life of Winnie Letha Currey (1903-1925)
- Comparing Infographics

Winnie’s Siblings:

- Herbert Miles Currey – ABC Biography
- Myrtle (Currey) Gaskill Jones – ABC Biography
- Mary (Currey) Walters – ABC Biography
- Earnest Oran Currey – ABC Biography
- Alma (Currey) Taylor Greenier – ABC Biography

Edward Osmund Briles (1891-1956)

- ABC Biography: Edward Osmond Briles
- A Time in the Life of Edward Osmond Briles and the Lyric Theater (1932-1933)
- An Act of Defiance: Audio Overview
- Honoring Edward Osmund Briles through Audio and Song

Edward's Siblings:

- Ethel (Briles) Smith – ABC Biography
- Glen Briles – ABC Biography
- Lulu (Briles) Cope – ABC Biography

Pauline Edith Mentzer (1896-1984)

- ABC Biography: Puline Edith Mentzer Briles
- Rembering Kenneth: A Chapter in the Life of Pauline Edith Mentzer Briles
- Pauline's Airplane Ride
- Bringing Pauline's Story to Life in Audio and Song

Pauline's Siblings:

- Gladys (Mentzer) Green – ABC Biography
- Paul Emory Mentzer – ABC Biography
- Leslie George Mentzer – ABC Biography
- Herbert Wells Mentzer – ABC Biography

Great Grandparents (Fourth Generation)

Judson Foster Crawford

- ABC Biography – Judson Foster Crawford

Josie Winifred Hammond Crawford

- ABC Biography: Josie Winifred Hammond
- Josie's Story in Video and Song

Hiram Miles Currey

- ABC Biography: Hiram Miles Currey
- Hiram's Story in Video and Song

Winifred Mae "Winnie" Hutchinson Currey

- ABC Biography: Winnie Hutchinson Currey
- Winnie Currey's Life in Song and Video
- Comparing Infographics

Edward Grant Briles

- ABC Biography: Edward Grant Briles
- Edward Grant Briles

Frances Artlissa "Artie" Ricketts Briles

- Biography: Francis Artlissa Ricketts
- Artie Briles in Song and Audio

Charles Oliver Mentzer

- AI Generated Biography (Charles Oliver Mentzer)
- Charles Mentzer's Story via Audio

Nettie Adell Wells

- Rooted in Kansas Soil
- Nettie Mentzer in Song and Overview

Fifth Generation

Washington Marion Crawford

-
- From Rapidan to Andersonville
- When Records Begin to Speak
- Washington Marion Crawford's Homestead Story
- A Homestead on the Kansas Prairie
- Comparing Infographics

Mary Foster Crawford

- Mary Foster Crawford
- When AI Needs More Context: Lessons forma Mary Crawford Biography
- More Ways to Tell the Story: Two Videos about Mary Foster Crawford
- A Day in the Life of Mary Crawford

Richmond Fisk Hammond

- Richmond Fist Hammond
- Richmond Hammond's Civil War Service
- A Different Look at Richmond Hammond's Military Career
- A Family Reconstructed from a Pension File
-

Sarah Ralston Hammond

- Sarah Ellen Ralston
- Cinematic Videos and the Question of Accuracy
- Peace Be Still
- Bringing Sarah's Story to Life
- A Time in the Life of Sarah Ellen (Ralston) Hammond
-

Hiram M. Currey

- ABC Biography – Hiram M. Currey
- Which Version Do You Prefer
- Bringing Hiram Currey's Story to Life
-

Angelina Jane Burke

- Angelina Jane Burke Currey
- Angelina's Song
- When Google Notebook LM Gets the Visuals Wrong
- Bringing Angelina Jane Burke Currey's Story to Life with Google Notebook LM and Canva
-

Albert Hutchinson

- ABC Biography: Albert Hutchinson
- Albert Hutchinson's Song
- The Paper Trail of Albert Hutchinson's Civil War Service
- Why Did Albert Hutchinson Desert?

Julia Harding

- Julia Harding Hutchinson
- Julia Harding Hutchinson — From Biography to Ballad
- Two Ways AI Helped Tell the Story of Julia Harding Hutchinson

Noah Washington Briles

Sarah Jane Thompson Briles

James Marshall Ricketts

Rachel Elmeda Christy

George Mentzer

Emiline Minnick

Thurston Kennedy Wells

Salome Adell Crandall

Friday Find

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
December 19, 2025
Michigan,Wells
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/12/19/friday-find-103/

Today's *Friday Find* is another photocopy of a marriage record for **Sadie Wells**, originally shared with me by a Michigan researcher. Thanks to FamilySearch's **Full Text Search** feature for digitized Michigan records, I was able to locate **two separate—but matching—marriage records** for Sadie Wells. One of these aligns exactly with the photocopy already in my files.

Michigan Marriage Records (Statewide Index)

The first record appears in a statewide collection of Michigan marriage records for **1889**, arranged alphabetically by county. Sadie's marriage is found under **Calhoun County** on **page 245 (image 500 of 640)**.

Michigan. Marriage Records: 1889 – Barry to Kalkaska Counties
Page 245 (Calhoun County)

> **747**
> *Oct 5, 1889*
>
> **James E. Snelgrove**, age 30, white, of Albion; born Homer; farmer.
> Father: James Snelgrove
> Mother: Mary E. Clark
>
> Married **6 October 1889** in Homer, Michigan, by H. E. Davis, clergyman.
>
> **Sadie A. Wells**, age 21, white, of Homer; born Eckford; housekeeper.
> Father: William W. Wells
> Mother: Martha Clark
>
> Witnesses:
> Mrs. Maggie Wells of Homer
> Ella H. Davis of Homer
>
> Recorded **8 October 1889**

Calhoun County Marriage Record

The second record comes from the **Calhoun County marriage books**, which are arranged by volume and page number rather than alphabetically by county. This entry appears in **Volume 4, page 50 (image 136 of 446)**.

While the details of the marriage are the same in both records, they originate from **two different record sets**.

Why Two Records Matter

A comparison of the two sources reveals an important distinction:

- Page 245 of the **Michigan statewide marriage records** includes marriages through **#748**.
- Page 50 of the **Calhoun County marriage book** includes marriages through **#750**.

This indicates that the same marriage information was recorded in **two separate record systems**, each requiring its **own citation**. For genealogical documentation, recognizing and citing both sources strengthens the reliability of the evidence.

Source Citations

- *Michigan, Calhoun County. Marriage Records, 1836–1943.* Film #1009297; DGS 4653764. Sadie Wells, October 1889; Volume 4, page 50; image 136 of 446; digitized images, FamilySearch (www.familysearch.org), viewed 13 December 2025.
- *Michigan, Marriage Records, 1868–1925.* Film #4207808. Sadie Wells, October 1889; page 245; image 500 of 640; digitized images, FamilySearch (www.familysearch.org), viewed 13 December 2025.

Finds like this are a good reminder of why it pays to look beyond a single record set. Although the information in both marriage entries is the same, each record comes from a different source and tells us something about how Michigan recorded and preserved vital records in the late 19th century. By identifying and citing both the statewide marriage index and the Calhoun County marriage book, this marriage of Sadie Wells is now documented with stronger, more complete evidence—turning a simple photocopy into a well-supported piece of the Wells family story.

An Act of Defiance

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
December 20, 2025
Artificial Intelligence,Briles
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/12/20/an-act-of-defiance/

Have you ever taken a public stand for something you believed in—loud enough, visible enough, that it might land you in real trouble? Most of us hope we'd be brave enough, though we're not always certain how far we'd actually go. My grandfather, **Edward O. Briles**, didn't hesitate. In 1933, he stepped squarely into the spotlight, challenging Emporia's long-standing Sunday laws and accepting the very real possibility of arrest to make his point.

The story of his defiance emerges from newspaper accounts, court transcripts, and community memory. The video below was created from a Google Notebook LM audio overview built from those historical records. It offers a brief glimpse into the choices he made—and the stand he was willing to take.

https://youtube.com/watch?v=QD5rmzT_rO0

Sept. 9: A Public Challenge
"We probably will be arrested."
LYRIC
Sept. 10: Arrested Twice on Day One
The Three Main Charges
Illegal Sunday labor
Compelling employees to work
Selling goods
15
Total Arrests
POLICE
NOVEMBER
1933
Nov. 13: Guilty in District Court
A jury finds Briles guilty on six counts after he appeals his initial convictions.
"I do not feel as if I have done anything wrong."

Edward O. Briles may never have seen himself as an activist, yet his willingness to challenge the status quo—and to accept the consequences—left a lasting imprint on Emporia's history and on our family's story. His defiance reminds us that ordinary people often shape change in extraordinary ways. As I continue exploring his life through records, headlines, and now AI-generated summaries, I'm struck by how one man's determination still resonates nearly a century later. I hope this video offers a window into that moment and honors the resolve behind his stand.

Saturday Night Genealogy Fun

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
December 21, 2025
SaturdayNightGenealogyFun
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/12/21/saturday-night-genealogy-fun-181/

It's Saturday night again—

Time for some more **Genealogy Fun!!**

Come on, everybody—accept the mission and execute it with precision. Here's your chance to sit on **Genea-Santa's lap (virtually)** and share your genealogy-themed Christmas wish list.

This week's mission:
Write your **2025 Genea-Santa letter**. Have you been a good genealogy girl or boy? What family history dreams, tools, or discoveries are on your wish list?

✉️ Dear Genea-Santa,

Thank you for being **SO, SO good** to me this past year.

Through a bit of Santa magic, the experimental **full-text search on FamilySearch** has become an ever-expanding reality. This tool has allowed my fingers to "do the dancing," uncovering records from the comfort of my home office—or with a short trip to my local public library.

Your magic has also kept me connected to the genealogy community through **Facebook groups, YouTube videos, webinars, Zoom meetings, and virtual RootsTech** events. Even when researching solo, I've never felt alone.

I've especially appreciated the creative ideas shared by others using **artificial intelligence tools** in genealogy. I'm particularly thankful for **Randy Seaver** and his willingness to share his **ABC Biography** process on the *Genea-Musings* blog—what a gift to the community.

Your Santa magic also helped bring a **Vivid-Pix Memory Station** and a **ScanSnap scanner** to the Nemaha County Historical Society. These tools are already making it easier to preserve and share precious historical documents and images.

That said, there are a few miracles I'm still hoping you can help with. I'm patiently waiting for your magic to:

- Identify the father of **James Crawford (1772–1854)**, husband of Sally Duggins
- Verify the death date and place of **Hiram Currey**, former Treasurer of the State of Ohio
- Find the death date and place of **Hiram Currey**, a lawyer in Peoria County, Illinois

Looking ahead to **2026**, dear Genea-Santa, I would greatly appreciate your help with:

- Keeping me and my husband healthy so we can each continue our genealogy journeys
- Helping me keep learning and experimenting with **AI tools**
- Expanding my access to records and research resources
- Deepening my understanding of **DNA results** to support my family tree
- Continuing my volunteer work at the **Nemaha County Historical Society**
- And lastly, using your magic to fill in the blanks on my tree—whether those blanks are missing death dates, unknown siblings, or elusive parents

Thank you, Genea-Santa, for all you do to keep our research exciting, challenging, and full of wonder.

With gratitude (and plenty of pedigree charts),
Marcia Crawford Philbrick

Reflections at Christmas Time

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
December 22, 2025
Christmas
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/12/22/reflections-at-christmas-time/

A Christmas Reflection — 2025

from Mike and Marcia

Another Christmas season has found its way to our door,
A year much like the last—just a little older than before.

Life didn't change directions, no sweeping turns to tell,
But steady days and familiar paths have served us very well.
Seneca still feels like home, where roots run deep and true,
And "grow where you're planted" still guides the things we do.

Autumn brought a cherished pause, a rhythm we still keep—
An October weekend spent with family by Acorns Lake,
Where laughter echoes softly and memories feel close,
Reminding us that time together matters most.

The sunflowers still call us down Kansas backroads wide,
Golden faces turned skyward, standing side by side.
They remain a symbol—bright, resilient, strong—
Much like the stories Marcia continues to carry along.

Genealogy fills many hours, questions leading to clues,
With records unearthed, stories shaped, and history renewed.
With a little help from AI along the research way,
Family stories are written, shared, and preserved day by day.

Mike keeps tending garden beds and lending a helping hand,
Serving where he's needed, rooted right where he stands.
Together we volunteer, we learn, we quietly give,
Grateful for the lives we've built and the way we get to live.

So as Christmas lights twinkle and another year draws near,
We're thankful for steady moments and those we hold dear.

For family, for friendship, for stories yet to tell,
And for growing older—together—where we're planted well.

May your Christmas be peaceful, your New Year kind and bright,
Filled with warmth, good memories, and small moments of light.

Merry Christmas,
Mike and Marcia

A Sad Christmas

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
December 23, 2025
Artificial Intelligence,Crawford
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/12/23/a-sad-christmas/

This narrative is written from the perspective of my mother, **Roberta Crawford**, imagining how she might have experienced the dramatic and emotional events surrounding Christmas. While the details come from family memories, phtographs and newspaper accounts, the voice reflects how these moments may have felt to her as a young wife and mother suddenly facing premature labor, loss, separation, and the hope that followed. It is a way to honor her experience—both the pain she endured and the strength she carried through those difficult weeks.

A Time in My Life: Christmas in Dodge City — From Roberta's Perspective

I still remember that December trip as if it sits in a separate pocket of time—bright with Christmas anticipation one moment and shadowed by heartbreak the next. Eugene and I had packed up our little Marcia, barely a year and a half old, and headed west to Dodge City to spend Christmas with his parents, Leon and Winnie Crawford, his brother L.R., and his grandmother, Josie. I was pregnant, of course, but with my due date still months away in March, everyone agreed the trip would be fine. It felt good to be going "home" for the holiday.

But on the evening of the 23rd everything changed. I went into labor—far, far too early. Before I could fully process what was happening, Eugene scooped me up and carried me to the car. I remember the cold air, the panic in his voice, and the blur of streetlights as he rushed me to Trinity Hospital. Within hours, our twin boys, David and Duane, were born—so tiny, so fragile. I barely had time to realize I was the mother of twins before the doctors warned us of the uphill battle ahead.

The next day, Christmas Eve, Duane slipped away before I was even able to hold him. I was still confined to my hospital bed, recovering, aching in body and in heart. I grieved from a distance, trying to understand how one child could be taken so quickly while his brother fought on. I wanted desperately to see Duane, to memorize him, to whisper a mother's blessing—but I never got the chance. That loss has stayed with me in a quiet, tender place ever since.

Christmas morning came, though it felt far from festive. Eugene, his mother Winnie, and Grandma Josie tried to give Marcia a cheerful morning, though I'm sure their hearts were as heavy as mine. While they balanced celebration with sorrow, the family had to make decisions I could not help with: arrangements to bury little Duane on the 26th in the Crawford family plot. I remained in the hospital, knowing that his tiny life would be honored and laid to rest without me there. It is one of the hardest things I have ever had to accept.

As the days passed, Eugene faced another impossible conflict—his job in Emporia needed him back before I was strong enough to travel. So he returned to work, and when I was finally discharged, Marcia and I boarded a train alone, leaving our surviving twin, David, behind in the hospital in Dodge City. I had to trust others to care for him when every instinct told me never to leave his side.

For the next six weeks, Winnie became our bridge—our hope. Every single day she went to the hospital to check on David, to hold him, to speak love and strength into his tiny world. She became his advocate, his voice, his steady visitor while I waited anxiously miles away, clinging to every update.

Then came Valentine's Day. Winnie boarded a train with little David in her arms—still so small, but strong enough to finally come home. When she arrived in Emporia and placed him in my arms, it felt like the world exhaled. Our family was still healing, still incomplete, but we were together. And in that moment, love and loss, heartbreak and hope, all wove themselves into the story of who we were—and who we would become.

Looking back, that Christmas became a defining chapter in our family story—one shaped by heartbreak, resilience, and love that stretched across miles and generations. Writing this narrative from Roberta's perspective is a small way to honor what she endured and to acknowledge the quiet courage behind those experiences. The loss of Duane, the fight for David's survival, the separation from Eugene, and the steadfast support of Winnie all wove together into a moment that shaped who we became as a family. By preserving and sharing this chapter, we not only remember the pain and the miracles of those weeks, but we also celebrate the enduring strength of the women and men who came before us.

Surname Tree

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
December 24, 2025
Uncategorized
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/12/24/surname-tree-2/

CRAWFORD
BRILES CURREY MENTZER
HAMMOND HUTCHINSON RICKETTS
WELLS FOSTER RALSTON BURKE HARDING THOMPSON
CHRISTY MINNICK CRANDALL SMITH OSTRANDER FISK McCORMICK
HARRIS BLAND MERRY FOWLER RUSH EVANS REED GALLIMORE MILES
JONES KENNEDY NAFUS SMITH BROWNING FORBES HALE ARNOLD BARR HALL REAGAN
VanARSDALE GRAVES ANDERSON NETTLETON PEABODY FLEWELLING BECKERDITE CLARK
IGLEHART GARRET STORY BUCKLES DAWSON BENTLEY MOTES JOSLIN SCHIEDEL BOVEY WHITE
BARNES
BUTLER
CARPENTER

As this is Christmas eve, I'm going to incorporate a Christmas theme by sharing my 'surname tree'.

Christmas Memories

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
December 25, 2025
#52ancestors
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/12/25/christmas-memories/

MAR • 62

Merry Christmas

Christmas of Joy and Sorrow

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
December 26, 2025
Artificial Intelligence,Crawford
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/12/26/christmas-of-joy-and-sorrow/

https://youtube.com/watch?v=RtnaFuBdn7k

For the next 6 Weeks:
A Grandmother's Vigil
23
Roberta given birth to premature twin boys, David and Duane, at Trinity Hospital.
24
December 24th:
A Tragic Loss
Baby Duane passes away before his mother, who is still recovering, gets to see him.
December 26th:
A Somber Farewell
The family buries Duane in the family plot while Roberta remains hospitalized.
Winnie Crawford visits baby David in the hospital every day.
14
Valentine's Day:
Reunited at Last

The above video is based on an audio overview and graphic created by Google Notebook LM.

Remembering Kenneth – A Chapter in the Life of Pauline Briles

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
December 27, 2025
Briles
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/12/27/remembering-kenneth/

Family stories often unfold in the quiet details—births, marriages, losses, and the small moments that tie one generation to the next. The following narrative draws together those pieces from the life of Pauline Edith Mentzer Briles, focusing on a brief but deeply meaningful chapter in her early adulthood. Using records, newspaper clippings, and family memories, this “time in her life” story offers a glimpse into Pauline’s joys, heartbreak, and the strength she carried forward.

A Time in the Life of Pauline Edith Mentzer Briles

ca. 1915–1922

I was born on March 28, 1896, in Woodson County, Kansas, to Charles Oliver Mentzer and Nettie Adell Wells. Growing up in rural Kansas shaped everything about me—my sense of family, of community, and of responsibility. Those early years taught me to work hard and stay close to those I loved.

By the fall of 1915, my life took a hopeful new turn when I married Edward Osmond Briles in Yates Center. Like many young couples of our time, we began our marriage with optimism, ready to build a home and a future together. That hope deepened when our first son, Kenneth Eugene, was born on September 26, 1918, in the little community of Vernon in Woodson County. Holding him, I felt the pure joy of motherhood and imagined watching him grow into the world around us.

But our joy was short-lived. In June of 1919, when Kenneth was only eight months old, he became gravely ill. We took him to Kansas City hoping doctors there could help him recover. Instead, on June 10, 1919, our sweet baby slipped away. His passing left an ache beyond words—a hollow place that no parent expects to carry. Friends and family gathered with us two days later at Crandall for his funeral, where we laid him to rest in the quiet country cemetery. Their sympathy carried us, but nothing could ease the profound grief of losing a child.

Life, however, requires forward motion even in the midst of sorrow. By January 1920, Osmond and I were living in Iola, Allen County. The census taker recorded my name, my age—24—and my birthplace of Kansas. To the world, these were simple facts, but beneath them lived a deeper truth: we were still learning how to move through our days without Kenneth.

In the years that followed, remembrance became one of the ways I stayed connected to him. On Decoration Day in 1922, I returned to the Crandall cemetery with my mother, Nettie, my brother Paul and his wife, and my sister, Mrs. Roy Green. Together, we placed flowers on Kenneth's grave. Standing there among family—those who had once lived in the same Vernon community where Kenneth was born—I felt the bond of shared memory. We honored not only his short life, but also the love that continues beyond loss.

Those years shaped me in ways I could not have understood at the time. They were marked by joy, heartbreak, resilience, and the steady presence of family. And even as life carried me forward, that chapter—Kenneth's chapter—remained forever written on my heart.

Pauline's story during these years is a reminder of how resilience is often shaped in the shadows of sorrow. Though her time as a young wife and mother brought both joy and unimaginable loss, she endured with the support of family and the grounding strength of her Kansas roots. Her willingness to remember, to return, and to honor her son's brief life speaks to a quiet courage that deserves to be preserved and shared. In telling this part of her journey, we ensure that both her love and her grief continue to be remembered by those who follow.

Saturday Night Genealogy Fun

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
December 28, 2025
SaturdayNightGenealogyFun
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/12/28/saturday-night-genealogy-fun-182/

Calling all Genea-Musings Fans!

It's **Saturday Night** again —
time for some more **Genealogy Fun!**

Come on, everybody — join in, accept the mission, and execute it with precision. This week's challenge is your chance to share the genealogy and family history *gear* you received over the holidays.

1) Was Genea-Santa good to you?

What genealogy-related gifts did you receive for Christmas this year?

My **Genealogy Santa** is more of a *year-round* kind of guy than a strictly Christmas-Day visitor. Thanks to his generosity, I already have a well-stocked toolbox to support both my genealogy research and my blogging adventures. Over the past year, that toolbox has quietly expanded to include a few AI subscriptions — modern tools that pair surprisingly well with old records.

Santa also hinted that a **second portable monitor** would be making an appearance before my next research trip. That promise carries two exciting implications: first, that both my husband and I can use a portable monitor at the same time — and second, that a research trip is officially on the horizon!

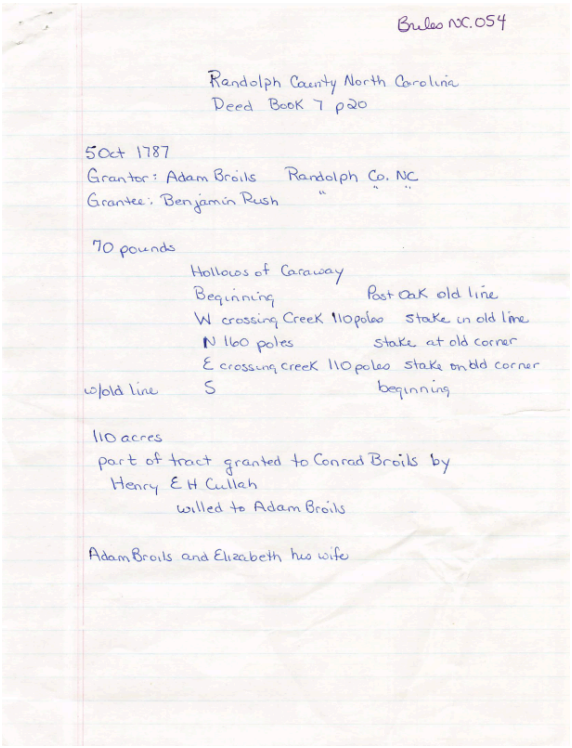
When it comes to my genealogy work, I'm incredibly grateful for the access, tools, and opportunities Santa has provided over the years. Whether it's new technology or trusted old resources, every gift helps move the research forward — one discovery at a time.

Monday's Diggings

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
December 29, 2025
Briles
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/12/29/mondays-diggings-20/

Adam Broils Deed – Randolph County, North Carolina (1787)

While digging through my **BRILES** folder, I uncovered a photocopy and handwritten notes for a **1787 Randolph County, North Carolina deed** in which **Adam Broils** sold land to **Benjamin Rush**. According to my notes, this land had been **willed to Adam by Conrad Broiles**, making the deed an important link between two generations of the Broiles family.


Broiles NC.054

Randolph County North Carolina
Deed Book 7 p20

5Oct 1787
Grantor: Adam Broils Randolph Co. NC
Grantee: Benjamin Rush "

70 pounds

Hollows of Caraway
Beginning Post Oak old line
W crossing Creek 110poles stake in old line
N 160 poles stake at old corner
E crossing creek 110poles stake on old corner
w/old line S beginning

110 acres
part of tract granted to Conrad Broils by
Henry E H Cullah
willed to Adam Broils

Adam Broils and Elizabeth his wife

Using **FamilySearch's Full Text Search**, I located this deed online on **film 7560686**. The images from this filming were usable, but the edges of the page were difficult to read in places. Fortunately, the combination of my earlier notes and a careful transcription allowed me to "fill in the blanks" and reconstruct the full deed text with confidence.

Curious about the image quality, I searched the **FamilySearch Catalog** and discovered that this volume had been filmed more than once. The images I initially viewed came from a **later filming**, but to my surprise, the **earlier filming produced a clearer image of the original record**. This was a good reminder that when multiple filmings exist, it's worth checking them all—sometimes the older images are actually better.

Below is my full transcription of the deed with the original source cited at the top. The information for the second (better) image of the deed is below the transcription.

Randolph County, North Carolina
Deeds

"Randolph, North Carolina, United States records," images, FamilySearch (https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3QSQ-G967-Y37R?view=explore : 13 Dec 2025), image 501 of 715; Image Group Number 007560686.
Another filming of Vol. 4–7 (1787–1797), Film 470226, DGS 7560686.
Page 20, image 501 of 715.

Transcription

This Indenture made this 3d day October
the year of our Lord one Thousand Seven hundred & Eighty seven
between Adam Broiles of the County of Randolph & State of No Carolina
the one part & Benjamin Rush of the County & State aforesaid of the
other part Witnesseth that for & in consideration of the sum of Seventy
pounds Current Money to him in hand paid by the said Benjamin
Rush the receipt whereof the said Adam Broiles doth hereby acknowledge
hath given, granted, bargained & sold, aliened, enfeoffed & conferred
and by these presents doth give, grant, bargain, sell, alien, enfeoff
& confirm unto the said Benjamin Rush his heirs & assigns forever
all that tract or parcel of land situate lying & being in the
County of Randolph & on the waters of Caraway beginning at a
post oak on the old line & running thence west crossing the creek
[110 poles] to a stake in the old line, thence north 160 poles to a stake
at old corner, thence east crossing the creek 110 poles to a stake on old
corner, thence south on the old line to the beginning, containing
110 acres of land, it being part of a tract of land formerly granted
to Conrad Broiles by Henry E. H. Culloh & by the said Conrad
Broiles willed to the said Adam Broiles & by the said Adam Broiles
to the said Benjamin Rush, with all woods, waters, mines, minerals,
hereditaments and appurtenances to the said land belonging or
appertaining, to have and to hold to the said Benjamin Rush his heirs
& assigns forever, well & clear from all incumbrance whatsoever,
the sum of money yearly or otherwise as our General Assembly hereafter
from time to time may direct only excepted.

And the said Adam Broiles & Elizabeth his wife for themselves and
their heirs, executors & administrators do covenant & agree to and
with the said Benjamin Rush his heirs & assigns that they or either
of them shall at any time hereafter execute any other conveyance or
conveyances which the said Benjamin Rush or his attorney learned in
the law may direct for the more full & final assurance of the above
described land & premises, provided always that such further
conveyances shall be at the cost of the said Benjamin Rush & contain
no other warranty than is herein contained.

In witness whereof they have hereunto set their hands & seals
the day & year above written.

Court Entry

State of North Carolina ⟊ Randolph County ⟊ August Term 1789
The execution of the foregoing deed of conveyance was duly proved in
open court by William Boyd & ordered to be registered.

Best Image Source:
Randolph County, North Carolina, Deeds, Vol. 5–8 (1785–1806),

Film 7517674; image 237 of 701.

This 1787 deed not only documents the transfer of land from Adam Broils to Benjamin Rush, but also helps bridge generations by confirming that the property originated with Conrad Broiles and passed to Adam by will. Beyond the family connection, this find is a good reminder of the value of revisiting records in different formats—examining multiple filmings can reveal clearer images and more complete details. Each deed like this adds another solid piece to the Briles puzzle and moves the story of this Randolph County family forward.

Honoring Edward Osmund Briles Through Audio and Song

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
December 30, 2025
Artificial Intelligence,Briles
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/12/30/honoring-edward-osmund-briles/

Today's post brings together two very different—yet beautifully complementary—ways of sharing the story of my grandfather, **Edward Osmund Briles**. His life stretched from the wheat fields of Coffey and Woodson Counties to the bright lights of small-town movie theaters, and thanks to a combination of AI tools, I'm able to present his story in new and engaging ways.

The first video features an **audio overview created through Google Notebook LM**, using historical records, newspaper clippings, and family documents to craft a narrative summary of Edward's life. It offers a clear, chronological telling of his journey—from threshing crews and auto garages to the Lyric Theatre in Emporia.

The second video takes a more artistic approach. I asked ChatGPT to write song lyrics based on Edward's life, then used **Suno.com** to turn those lyrics into a **folksy ballad**—a musical tribute that captures the spirit of his Kansas story.

Using **Canva**, I combined each audio file with an accompanying image to create the two videos shared below. Together, they offer both a factual and a heartfelt glimpse into who Edward Osmund Briles was, and how his life continues to inspire those of us who follow in his footsteps.

EO Briles: Entrepreneur

https://youtube.com/watch?v=UVz7uIKAvMY

Osmond's Tale

https://youtube.com/watch?v=g1dnHWqnPl4

Conclusion

Bringing these two videos together—one a narrative retelling of my grandfather's life, the other a musical tribute inspired by his journey—has allowed me to see Edward Osmund Briles through both a factual and an emotional lens. The tools may be modern, but the heart of the story remains rooted in the Kansas fields, workshops, and theaters where he built his life. By blending historical records, family memories, and creative technology, I hope these pieces preserve not just what Edward did, but who he was. His life continues to echo through our family, and these videos offer a new way to share that legacy with future generations.

Year in Review

By Marcia Crawford Philbrick
December 31, 2025
Artificial Intelligence
https://heartlandgenealogy.org/2025/12/31/year-in-review/

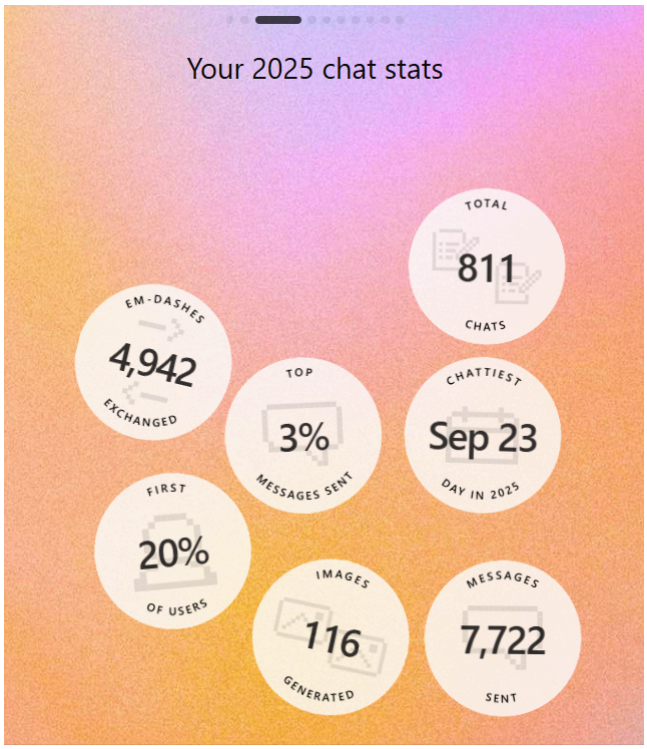
For me, **2025 was a year of learning how to work alongside Artificial Intelligence**. While I haven't explored AI as deeply as some of the leaders in the Genealogy and Artificial Intelligence community, I've benefited greatly from watching others—especially **Randy Seaver**—experiment, test boundaries, and share their results. What began as occasional use for tasks like transcribing newspaper articles gradually evolved into something much more integrated in my research and storytelling.

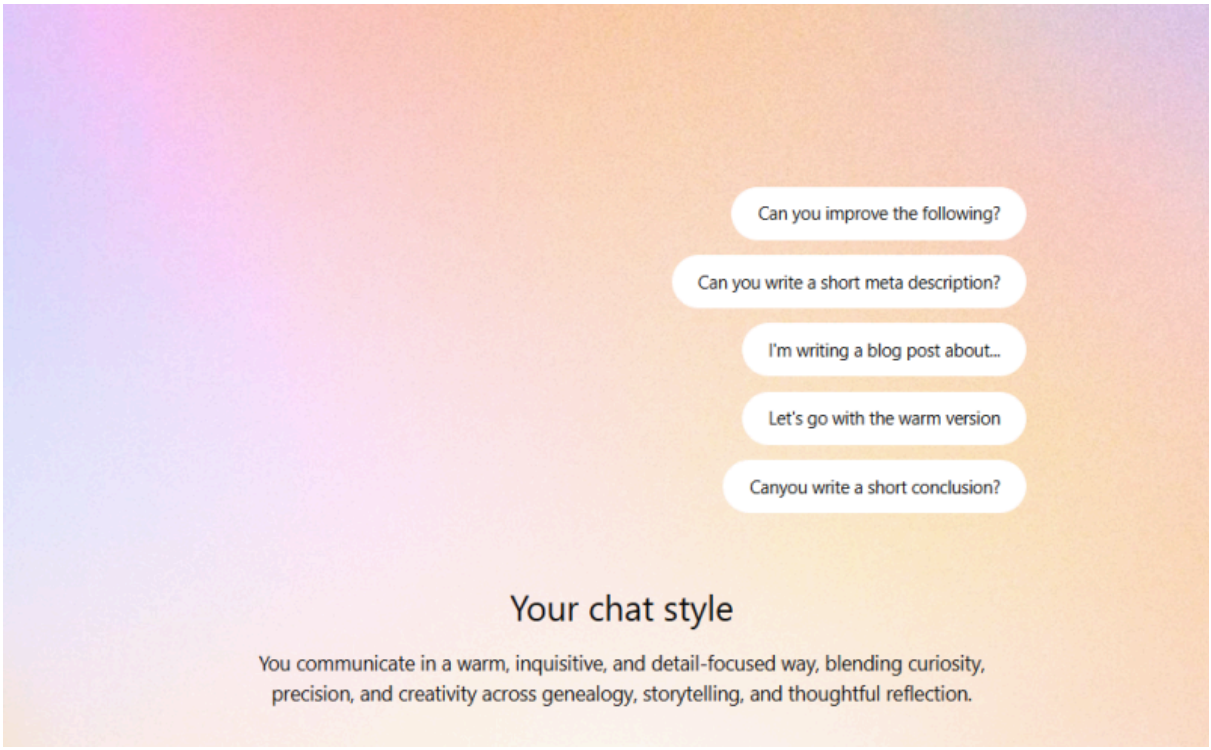
Over the past year, I've experimented with several tools, including **Google's Notebook LM**, **Perplexity**, and **Suno**, each offering unique ways to analyze, interpret, or present information. Still, my everyday companion has been **ChatGPT**, which has become part research assistant, part writing partner, part creative collaborator.

Below are screenshots from my **ChatGPT "Year in Review,"** a snapshot of how this tool has fit into my daily genealogy work—helping me explore records, shape narratives, and find new ways to share family history.

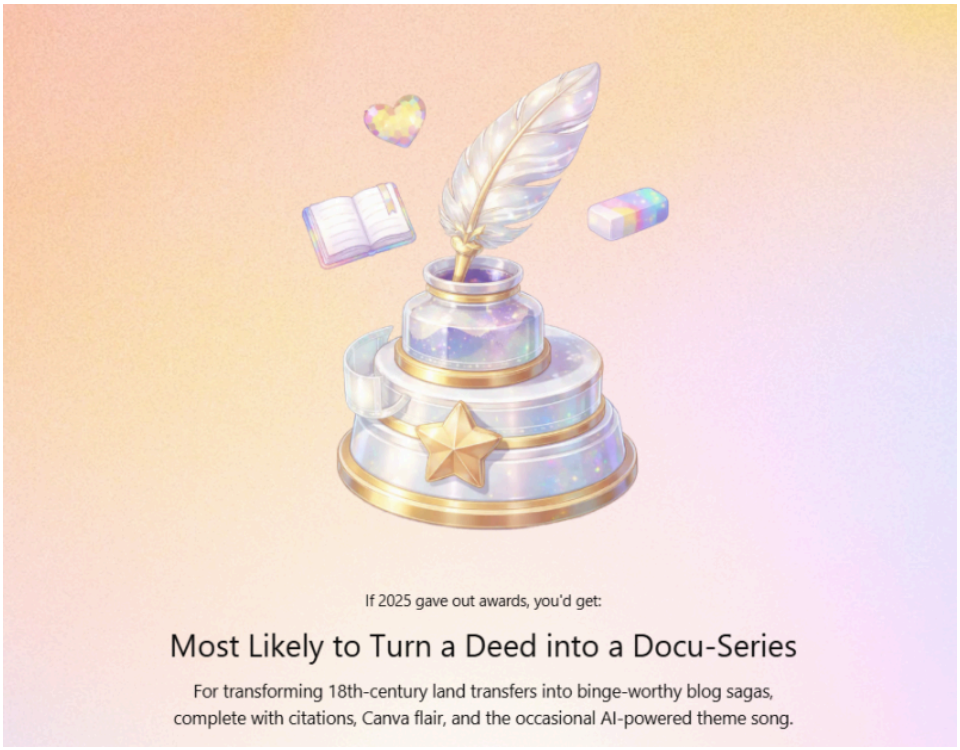
Your year in poetry

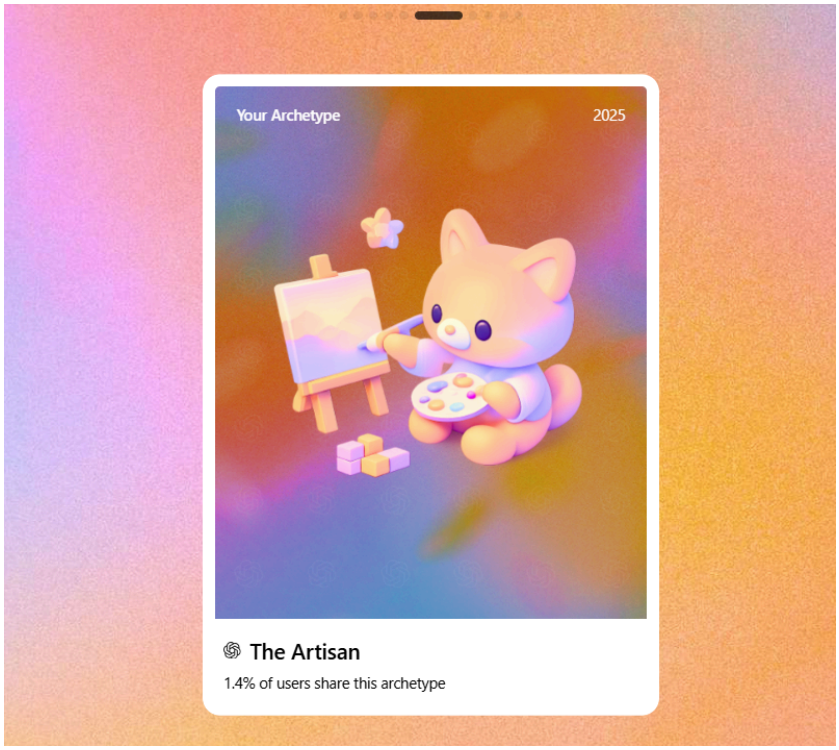
Through archives and stories you steer,
With purpose that's steady and clear.
From Broiles deeds to purple hearts bright,
You've woven the past into light —
A curator of memory's year.

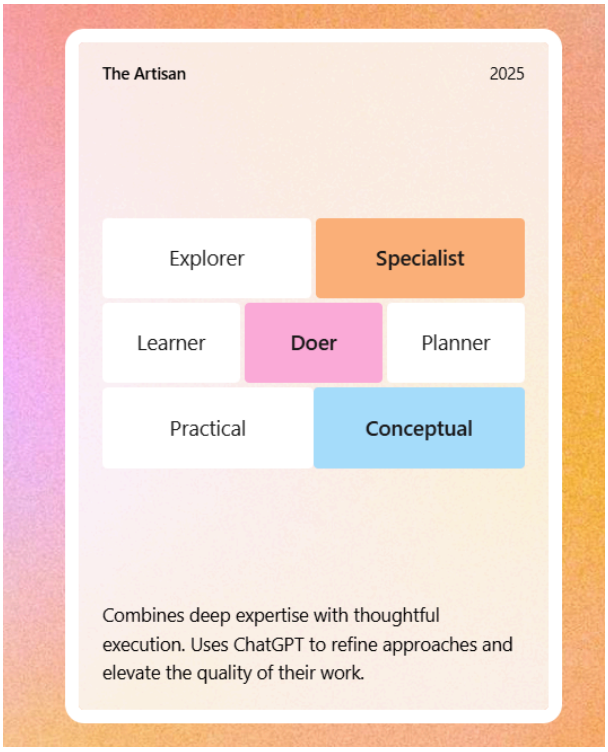

Your 2025 chat stats
TOTAL
811
CHATS
EM-DASHES
4,942
EXCHANGED
TOP
3%
MESSAGES SENT
CHATTIEST
Sep 23
DAY IN 2025
FIRST
20%
OF USERS
IMAGES
116
GENERATED
MESSAGES
7,722
SENT


Can you improve the following?
Can you write a short meta description?
I'm writing a blog post about...
Let's go with the warm version
Canyou write a short conclusion?
Your chat style
You communicate in a warm, inquisitive, and detail-focused way, blending curiosity, precision, and creativity across genealogy, storytelling, and thoughtful reflection.

Three big themes of 2025
Deep Genealogical Storytelling
You turned research into living history—transcribing deeds, curating ABC Biographies, and weaving multimedia narratives that link family, place, and time.
Museum and Community Stewardship
You strengthened Nemaha County's Historical Society—launching the Purple Heart Walk, improving digital exhibits, and engaging volunteers through creative outreach.
AI as Creative Partner
You embraced AI as a collaborator—refining transcriptions, crafting audio and song, and blending technology with heart to preserve family heritage.


If 2025 gave out awards, you'd get:
Most Likely to Turn a Deed into a Docu-Series
For transforming 18th-century land transfers into binge-worthy blog sagas, complete with citations, Canva flair, and the occasional AI-powered theme song.


Your Archetype
2025
The Artisan
1.4% of users share this archetype


The Artisan
2025
Explorer
Specialist
Learner
Doer
Planner
Practical
Conceptual
Combines deep expertise with thoughtful execution. Uses ChatGPT to refine approaches and elevate the quality of their work.

ScanSnap
WWII
RootsMagic
Genealogy Guide
Your year, painted in pixels
"Still Life with Scanner and Sunflower Mug" – ChatGPT, 2025
A ScanSnap hums beside a sunflower mug, flanked by a folded WWII poster, a RootsMagic manual, and a flickering pixel candle of curiosity.

Note: ChatGPT still struggles drawing a pedigree chart!

Looking back, what stands out most about 2025 isn't any single tool, but how thoughtfully these technologies have fit into my existing research habits. Artificial Intelligence didn't replace the careful work of evaluating sources, citing records, or asking good genealogical questions—it simply offered new ways to move those tasks forward. As I head into another year of research, writing, and discovery, I'm excited to continue experimenting, learning, and sharing what works (and what doesn't), all while keeping the focus where it belongs: preserving and telling our families' stories.